PRIVATE EYE

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The Mail on Sunday 2003

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Eye Writers Nominated For Top Awards

PRIVATE EYE journalists star in British Press Awards shortlist.

The Judges have named the following Eye regulars:

Columnist of the Year
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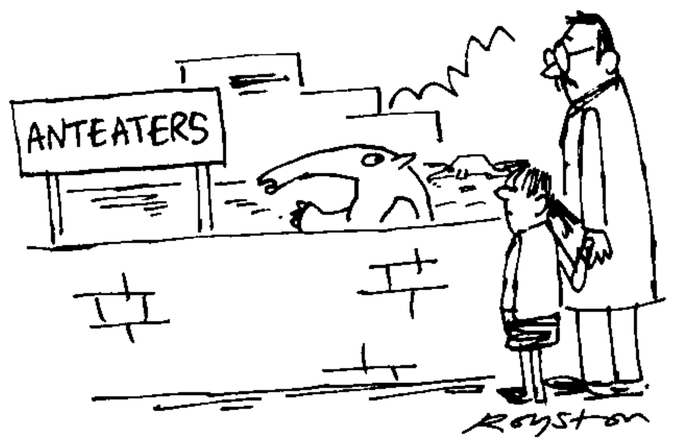
Commended for his forthright views on asylum seekers and other topical issues.

Sports Writer of the Year
Sally Jockstrap
Applauded for her coverage of the Grand Prix at Twickenham.

Political Commentator of the Year
Dave Spart
Veteran voice of controversy.

Doyenne of the Social Scene of the Year
Glenda Slagg
Balanced view of world affairs.

Proprietor of the Year
Lord Gnome
Fearless defence of his right to sack all of the above in the interests of saving money.



"It's not as if that's all I do: I write poetry, I'm very much involved in charity work... why single out that one thing?"

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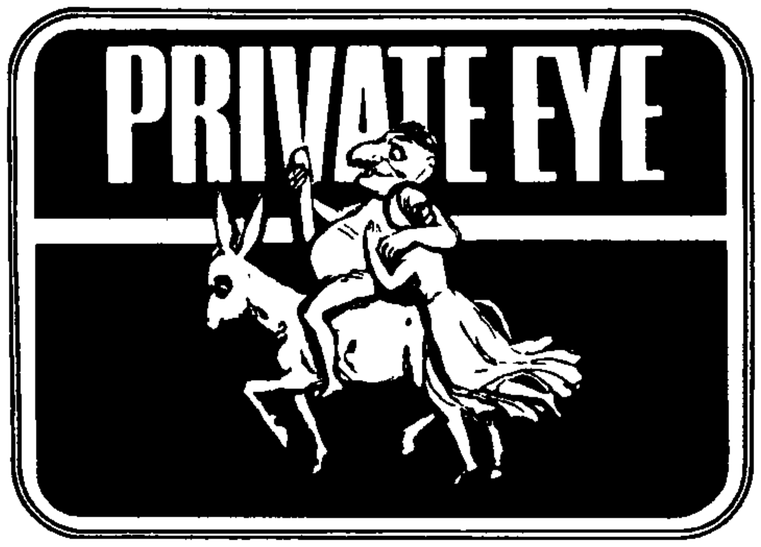

Mid-Heir Collision

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LABOUR's election campaign coordinator Alan "Onion Balls" Milburn appeared on stage at the Gateshead conference centre last weekend to baffle party activists with a slide show that included advice on the "campaign approach".

"There has to be less about issues – more about people!" said Onion Balls. There "needs to be less talk – and more conversation!"

After delivering this empty drivel, on the way out of the centre Milburn became slightly entangled in the revolving doors. Amid the kerfuffle a brave Geordie was overheard to offer advice: "Forward, not back, Alan!" The fate of the delegate remains unknown.

AFTER failing to sustain its endowment mis-selling case against Legal & General, and hot on the heels of the split capital debacle, the financial services authority (FSA) has announced yet another review of its enforcement procedures.

This latest study is just six months after the last "end to end" review under the FSA's head of enforcement, Andrew Proctor, made recommendations for "speeding-up the decision-making process without undermining its fairness or the quality of the decisions made."

But after the splits and L&G fiascos, Proctor has left the FSA for an easier life at Deutsche Bank, bequeathing the current review to FSA director David Strachan. He will be ably assisted by David Pritchard, appointed by FSA chief executive John Tiner as adviser to the review.

Mr Pritchard knows a bit about enforcement in the financial sector. After a stint at the ineffectual self-regulatory body that preceded the FSA, the securities and investment board (SIB), he has spent the last few years as a director of Lloyds TSB. Fifteen months ago the bank was fined £1.9m by the FSA and forced to pay £98m compensation to 22,500 customers whom it mis-sold its "extra income and growth plan", which turned out to be less good than its name suggested. Perfect experience for advising the FSA on handing out penalties to financial miscreants.

THE government spent public money on opinion poll research to help it sell its hated ID cards to reluctant voters long before the scheme was passed by parliament.

The *Eye* has also learnt that taxpayer-funded pollsters actually *argued* with their interviewees in an attempt to persuade them that ID cards were a good idea, as well as offering the government handy propaganda points with which to win over voters.

The survey's "objectives", uncovered by Lib Dem home affairs spokesman Mark Oaten, were to investigate "motivations and barriers to acceptance of identity/entitlement cards, and ideas about how they can most effectively be presented to the public in any future publicity campaign".

However, civil service guidelines clearly state that polls should not be used for party political purposes. As the surveys were before parliament voted on ID cards, the research was party political, or in Oaten's view a "clear abuse of government guidelines and of taxpayers' money".

The three surveys for the home office by Cragg Ross Dawson were in 2003 and 2004 and made one big change to Labour's campaign. The then home secretary David Blunkett initially tried selling ID cards euphemistically as "entitlement cards". However, pollsters found that "'entitlement cards' was thought superficially softer and warmer, but less familiar and 'weasely'." Not wanting to appear weasel-like, the government dropped the euphemism.

The home office-funded research hints that Labour will soon be claiming that opponents of ID card are anti-social misfits. Said the pollsters: "It may be worth considering the thought that support for identity cards equates to voluntarily participating in society, and a way of expressing self-inclusion – a positive statement of belonging at a time when it is important for people to be mutually supportive. By implication, rejection of the idea could be seen as tantamount to a refusal to participate or belong."

NOTHING is going right for NOMS, the £4bn national offender management service.

The bill that was supposed to put it on a statutory footing was pulled last week ahead of its second reading, leaving no time to introduce it before a likely general election.

Although the home office maintained the decision to drop the management of offenders and sentencing bill was down to "pressure of business" and that other bills were being prioritized, Napo, the probation union, was told the move was because of opposition in the Lords. In other words, the bill was not going to get a smooth ride and it needed some serious redrafting.

Meanwhile NOMS itself continues on its costly and chaotic way, with the new man in charge of its constantly evolving "vision", John Tuckett, coming up with yet another blueprint. The latest envisages the end of the probation service in favour of "public sector interventions organizations" and "private sector organizations" within two years – but with no detail of how NOMS reaches what he has called the "end state".

Asked at a recent staff meeting to explain, Tuckett, who used to work at the MoD on submarines, said NOMS "was like a ship at night steering its way towards a lighthouse". As one person helpfully pointed out, ships that head towards lighthouses tend to end up on the rocks.

"Is this your first trip to Ikea?"

Street Of Shame

"THE newly released list of guests officially entertained at Chequers between 1997 and 2001 is a testament to the sublime discretion of the British dinner guest," writes *Guardian* columnist Catherine Bennett. "The list... features enough lushes, bigmouths and phoneys to have prompted the spilling of a few crumbs of gossip. But nothing doing. We don't even know if the food is any good. It seems an excessively showy, very nearly butler-ish display of reticence on everyone's part."

But what of her own newspaper's sublime discretion? Last Wednesday, while other newspapers reported on the Chequers hospitality, the news pages of the *Grauniad* carried not a word. Bennett's small item the next day was the only mention at all. Might this "butlerish reticence" by any chance be related to the inclusion on Blair's guest-list of *Grauniad* editor Alan Rusbridger and his wife, plus *Grauniad* hacks Polly Toynbee and David Walker?

By contrast, the *Daily Mail* turned the story into a front-page splash ("BLAIR AND THE CHEQUERS CRONIES") and cleared a two-page spread inside for the complete list of "Tony's Chequers chums". Those pilloried as Blairite creeps included several hacks – Andrew Marr, Will Hutton, James Naughtie and their wives – as well as News International boss Les Hinton. But one hack on the official list was omitted from the *Mail*'s roll of shame, even though she and her husband enjoyed a most convivial Chequers dinner in the winter of 1997. Step forward... the late Lynda Lee-Potter of the *Daily Mail*!

THE *Daily Mail* declared itself to have "mixed feelings" about Charles and Camilla's marriage – and just how mixed was clear from the headlines in the 21 pages it devoted to the story.

These included: "They must repent for all their sins"; "Bitter memories of the status stripped from Palace outcasts"; "Insult to Diana's memory"; "This insult to Camilla and British women"; "Behind the public pleasure, Harry is still hurting"; "The tawdry tapes that will haunt them forever"; and "Unforgivable: Don't Expect Me to Celebrate Today."

As the paper's editorial column observed, "the royal feelgood factor promises Tony Blair the best possible start to his election campaign". If this is what *Mail* editor Paul Dacre regards as feeling good, Camilla had better hope she never comes across him in a bad mood.

TRUE to form the *Independent* filled its front page last Friday with news of everything but the royal engagement.

However, this piety wasn't so apparent when the news broke the previous morning. Subscribers to the *Indie* online were sent a screaming stop-press alert to announce the happy news with a promise that the site would be "updating throughout the day with full implications".

ANDREW "Brillo Pad" Neill has a brilliant wheeze to lure new readers to his Sunday rag *The Business*. Within the M25 area, each copy now comes with an issue of a magazine such as *Fortune, Time or The Week*. As his front-page puff yelled on 6 February: "Inside this week and every week – a world-class magazine FREE with *The Business*."

Naughty Brillo! A normal issue of *The Business* costs 70p, but for those with a magazine the cover-price has been quietly hiked to £1.50. So the magazines are FREE in the sense that, er, you have to pay extra for them.

"CHARLES Golding has been made editor-in-chief of the free London newspaper *Jewish News*," the *Guardian* reports. Important news, clearly. But, er, *who he*?

Taking its cue from the official press release, the *Grauniad* explains that Golding's distinguished career has included stints as a presenter at TV-am and features editor of the *Sunday Mirror*. "He spent three years at the *Sunday Express* in the early 1990s, rising to become Eve Pollard's deputy."

This hardly does justice to his impressive CV, however. No mention, for instance, of his eventual sacking from the *Express* for accusing a senior executive of being a drunk. Nor of his legendary book *Rats – The New Plague*, which warned that London was being menaced by a plague of killer rodents. Nor of his disastrous libel action against Lord Gnome in 1991, which left Golding (or his then employer, Robert Maxwell) with a bill for costs of £45,000.

Perhaps these were omitted because they seem irrelevant to his new position editing a free Jewish newspaper. But one other detail from the glittering career of this bow-tied buffoon surely deserves a mention. In 1989 Golding was appointed editor of *The Jewish Herald*, a weekly free-sheet in the London area. The paper closed three months after his arrival.

STAFF at London's Natural History Museum read with amazement a recent interview in the *Times* business section with Deirdre Candlin, in which she boasted of being head-hunted as the museum's director of visitor services as soon as she finished her MBA.

Candlin modestly described how she had introduced "cooperation across departments" and created "an extraordinary spirit of team-working, giving staff a real feeling of power". This talented manager clearly cannot be the same Deirdre Candlin who provoked more than 24 of the museum's top scientists to sign a letter to the trustees last year expressing their "grave concern" at her conduct. She had, they said, been responsible for "the breakdown of trust at all levels, the creation of a culture of fear, and a complete erosion of confidence".

The boffins listed a string of misdemeanours, culminating in a totally unnecessary PriceWaterhouseCoopers investigation which cost the museum £340,000 in fees alone, money the museum could ill afford at a time when it was trying to raise funds for the ambitious Darwin II project. Candlin was also accused of covertly copying the hard drives on staff computers, including that of the museum's director.

Soon after this extraordinary protest she was sent "on secondment" to work at a charity, and has not yet returned to the museum. Yet in the *Times* interview she claims to have "consolidated my position at the museum". Shome mishtake, surely?

STEPHEN Moss's *Guardian* feature questioning the saintly Ellen MacArthur's status as a national heroine provoked strong reactions internally.

Sports hack Richard Williams went into print to attack "the stupidity of some of the opinions expressed in this newspaper over the past few days, usually by people for whom a Saturday morning trip to the gym represents the pinnacle of personal attainment."

Williams' colleague David Hopps fired off an email to Moss telling him it was cynical, sneering articles like his that were costing the *Grauniad* readers. How lucky the paper now has Sir Simon Jenkins to save the day.

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

"IF YOU don't take a job as a prostitute, we can stop your benefits," shrieked the *Sunday Telegraph* over an article by freelancer Clare Chapman which claimed that a 25-year-old unemployed waitress had been told just that by her local job centre in Germany.

"She received a letter from the job centre telling her that an employer was interested in her 'profile' and that she should ring them," reported Chapman. "Only on doing so did the woman, who has not been identified for legal reasons, realise that she was calling a brothel. Under Germany's welfare reforms, any woman under 55 who has been out of work for more than a year can be forced to take an available job – including in the sex industry – or lose her unemployment benefit."

Chapman went on to cite the case of brothel owner Ulrich Kueperkoch who was taking his local job centre to court for refusing to allow him to advertise for prostitutes.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury knows, however, headlines in the *Sunday Telegraph* are not always what they seem. Such a situation is in theory possible, as Berlin's paper *Die Tageszeitung* pointed out in an 18 December article about welfare reforms, although the paper was unable to find any evidence of it happening (and pointed out that brothels tend to use "other recruitment channels" anyway). The refusal of Gvirlitz job centre to carry Herr Kueperkoch's adverts was precisely so that such a situation could *not* occur – a spokesperson told *Deutsche Welle* that they had "decided not to be active in that market sector due to its belief that such work could infringe on an individual's rights if he or she is forced to take the job".

As for the 25-year-old waitress, she is presumably Sabine Bright, who in July 2003 was reported to have been accidentally offered an interview for bar work in an establishment which the Berlin labour office had failed to realise was a brothel. She made her excuses and left, her benefits entirely unaffected. So who had made the threat "if you don't take a job as a prostitute, we can stop your benefits?" Er, absolutely no one.

This did not, however, deter that master of inaccuracy, Mark Steyn, from using the story as the kicking-off point for his *Daily Telegraph* column the following day. "I'm fairly blase about European decadence these days," he announced. "I barely raised an eyebrow at the news that an unemployed waitress in Berlin faces the loss of her welfare benefits because she's refused to take a job as a prostitute in a legalised brothel."

He also apparently failed to raise an eyebrow at the tale of Richard Kral, the Slovakian man who "peed his way out of an avalanche", the topic of his column a week later – despite the fact that since appearing in the *Mirror* and *Express* the previous month, the story had been revealed as nothing more than an email joke.

IT'S not often that the *Daily Mail* gives a free pass to a "new" Labour initiative, particularly when it involves the department of education spending £20m of taxpayers' money on a teachers' satellite channel, a venture about which many in the public sector have reservations. But the *Mail* was prepared to give Teachers' TV the benefit of the doubt when it launched last week.

"The channel is run by Education Digital – a consortium made up of independent production company Brook Lapping, ITV and London's Institute of Education," it reported. "Nigel Dacre, Education Digital's chief executive and former editor of ITV News, said it would provide 'ideas and inspiration' for busy professionals. 'The channel will showcase hundreds of classrooms across the country, sharing the great work, materials and excellent teaching practice that exist in our schools,' he added. 'I believe Teachers' TV will become an invaluable resource for the teaching profession.'"

The *Mail*'s surprisingly upbeat report suggested that 90 percent of teachers would probably watch the new channel. What it didn't mention was that Nigel Dacre is the brother of, er, the editor of the *Daily Mail*.

MORE black *(sic)* humour at the *Daily Telegraph*, where nearly 100 journalists face redundancy amid a company-wide cull of up to 300 staff.

The clue to 1 Across in last Friday's crossword was more than usually apposite: "How to avoid sack when the going gets hot? (4,6)" . Even if some hacks do find the "fire escape", one in five of them won't escape the sack.

Tsunamiballs

■ "Since November 2004 like-for-like sales growth has slowed as experienced by other high-ticket retailers. This coincided with the third interest rate rise which caused a slowdown in the housing market. This coupled with the Tsunami disaster has resulted in a lack of 'feel-good' factor and a more careful consumer. However, the board still feels optimistic that this is a short-term adjustment…" — **Chairman's statement from, er, Middlesbrough-based Laminates Flooring Direct.**

■ "The horrendous Tsunamis hit southern Asia and hundreds of thousands died, or are homeless and with nothing," *Card Player* magazine notes. "There is much sorrow, pain and heartbreak in the world. Be part of the solution rather than the problem." And how can this be achieved? By, er, playing poker. "Poker is not the end of the world," it explains.

■ "Normally you'd get the full 'there I was…' intro followed by some blurb about the oily bits and then a decent slug of assessment," Steve Sutcliffe writes in *Autocar*, reviewing the new Ford F-150 pick-up truck. However, "in an era of giant tsunamis washing away thousands of people on the other side of the world" he feels it would be naïve to test and endorse "a truck that weighs two-and-a-half tonnes, emits more carbons than a car park full of Fiat Pandas, is damn nearly 20 feet long and seats only four people in comfort". Alas, he omits to explain how this monster might affect the tectonic movement of the earth's crust.

■ "So spookily is Bloc Party's finger on the pulse of the time that their debut album – *Silent Alarm* – is named after an earthquake warning system." — **Kitty Empire, *Observer*.**

■ "Toby is our eight-year-old indoor cat. Never cuddly, perhaps, due to his experience in his last home, he has been remarkably clingy of late. We think he has sensed our recent upset as a consequence of the Tsunami in the Far East." — **Pets' advice column in *Daily Telegraph*.**

THE MOBSTER, THE PRESS BARON AND THE TERRIFIED WITNESS

IN JANUARY 1990 an FBI wiretap recorded the legendary mafia don John Gotti discussing the Gambino family's latest recruits. "I want guys that done more than killing," he said. "I like the Richies… They're beautiful guys."

He was thinking particularly of Richard Martino, aka "Richie from the Bronx", whose business talents were much admired by the Dapper Don. But now that Martino is awaiting trial in New York on racketeering charges arising from a $700m internet-porn scam, FBI investigators and the American press are showing a surprising interest in his dealings with another Richard – our very own Dirty Desmond, aka "Richie of the bonks".

Richard Martino

One witness due to testify in the case is Philip Bailey, the former managing director of Dirty Des's company Northern & Shell, who was beaten up by mafia hoodlums while visiting New York on Des's behalf in 1992. Bailey was so traumatised by the incident that he has always refused to discuss it publicly – until now.

Evidence will also be heard from Martino's co-defendant Norman Chanes, a millionaire porn ad-man and former business associate of Desmond, who is now cooperating with the prosecutors and singing like a canary. From affidavits filed by FBI agent Beth Ambinder, and leaks to papers such as *Newsday* and the *Village Voice*, it is already apparent that Dirty Des can expect embarrassment galore.

The trouble began in September 1992 when Martino and Chanes flew to London and met Desmond for tea at the Four Seasons hotel. Over the previous few years they had spent well over $1m advertising dial-a-porn services in his publications, but now they wanted their money back. Desmond, they claimed, had been ripping them off by vastly overstating the magazines' circulation. As Martino put it: "You're fucking us."

According to Chanes, Desmond's response was to call Martino stupid and common – which suggests that he probably didn't realise Martino was a "made man" from the Gambino clan. The usually suave and smooth-talking mafioso quickly reverted to his other personality, that of Richie from the Bronx. "This is not over," he snarled as Desmond walked out, warning him that he'd better not try to bring out any porn-mags in the US.

Undaunted, Desmond sent his lieutenant Philip Bailey to New York just two weeks later to look for publishing opportunities. When Martino learned he was in town, he allegedly told Chanes that "I'm gonna send a car to get him… I'm gonna give him a message for his boss." Bailey was then kidnapped by several burly thugs in a limo with tinted windows, who pistol-whipped him, slashed his face and applied a Taser-style electric prod to his testicles. "We want our money back," they yelled. "You tell your fucking boss. It's a small pond… Tell your boss he's a dead man."

Bailey was so badly battered that British Airways refused to let him board his plane, and he had to convalesce for several days at the house of porn magnate Bob Guccione before he could return home. On his arrival in London, he was met at the airport by three bodyguards and taken straight to Desmond's house. According to the *Village Voice*, which has seen Bailey's affidavit, Dirty Des said: "You don't look so bad, Bailey." A furious Bailey leaped at Desmond and had to be pulled off by the bodyguards. Desmond allegedly added that he had no intention of paying Chanes a penny: "He can whistle for it."

Days later, however, Desmond's minder James Brown was dispatched to the back room of a London restaurant to deliver £2m in cash, packed in five Nike bags. Sources close to Brown claim that Desmond had received an ultimatum: pay £2m or you're dead. Philip Bailey resigned from Northern & Shell soon afterwards.

When the *Times* looked into the story five years ago, Desmond's spokesman assured the paper that "Richard Desmond has never met and never heard of Ricky [*sic*] Martino… Richard is aware of the claims that Philip Bailey was attacked while he was in New York. Both Richard's views, and that of the authorities, were that the claims amounted to no more than fantasy." But several witnesses in New York who saw Bailey after the attack confirm he was badly injured.

He was also scared out of his wits, understandably enough – and still is. On 28 January he rang an FBI agent to say that a private investigator was looking for him in London. When the FBI spoke to Bailey's business partner, who had discovered that the private eye was on the trail, the partner "began to cry and stated that he felt very threatened and intended to hold his children 'extra tight' until the situation was resolved".

Two weeks ago federal prosecutors in Brooklyn asked Judge Carol Amon to lock up Martino (who is on $2m bail) to stop him harassing potential witnesses. Although the judge refused, she did order him to wear an electronic tag so his movements could be monitored.

Perhaps Dirty Des thinks this latest threat is "no more than fantasy"? That is the line taken by Martino's lawyers, who have ridiculed the idea that Richie from the Bronx would try to intimidate Philip Bailey. They put it all down to "delicate British sensibilities". But even Desmond's famously brutish sensibilities may become a bit delicate once the trial gets under way. Jury selection is due to begin this week.

"They do so enjoy these SingalongaEminem nostalgia evenings"

OLD MEN FORGET

WHEN the Great Doctor Jonathan Miller appeared on *Desert Island Discs* at the end of last month, he took great pride introducing his third record, *The Harry Lime Theme*, recalling how he had lied to his mother about where had was going, after stealing 2/6 from her purse to creep off to the cinema to see the film. This he described precisely as happening in "1947". Odd that everyone else in post-war Britain had to wait until 1949 for the film to come out.

Meanwhile, in a moving, hour-long documentary on Churchill's funeral, Lord Deedes recounted how Churchill had continued to totter into the Commons until only a few months before his death. He recalled on his last ever visit he had come into the tearoom where he had spied Nye Bevan, whom WSC had once described as "a squalid nuisance". How moving it was, said Lord Deedesh, to see Churchill on his last visit deliberately going over to sit next to Nye. Alas, Churchill's last visit to the House was in 1964 and Bevan had died in 1960.

NEVER let it be said that Robert Kilroy-Silk's Veritarse party is a one-man band: it now has a second elected representative following the defection of the fragrant Damian Hockney, a UKIP member of the London assembly.

Hockney was previously a parliamentary candidate who stood against Michael Portillo in the Kensington and Chelsea by-election under the slogan "It takes a real man to defeat the EU". But in fact he has very few real bits left in his body thanks to his love of cosmetic surgery.

There have been nips and tucks galore, plus liposuction and a nose job. He has also confessed to wanting a "buttock implant" to make him look sexier in jeans. Veritarse may not be the biggest political party in Britain, but with Hockney and the permatanned Kilroy in the vanguard it will be hard to beat for physical vanity.

ROBERT Kilroy-Silk's new political party, Veritas, has already been threatened with legal action by the American computer company of the same name, but it appears he may have taken his inspiration elsewhere.

In January 2003 the ABC network in the US aired *Veritas: The Quest*, an action series following the adventures of "hyper-intelligent but rebellious teenager Nikko Zond" after he became caught up in the activities of the Veritas Foundation, a "mysterious brotherhood" dedicated to "seeking the truth behind the universal mysteries of history and civilization".

By episode three the programme's publicity reveals that the group's quest to find "an ancient crystal skull once owned by Hitler" had led them to become involved with "a secret neo-Nazi organization with plans to raise the Fourth Reich", but sadly we will never know whether their struggle was victorious: *Veritas: The Quest* was cancelled after just four episodes due to indifference from viewers and a scathing reaction by critics. The *LA Times* called it "a dose of silliness, which may test the patience and credulity of even the teen crowd."

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

11 February: Department of Transport launches new fuel efficiency scheme to tackle climate change

11 February: Tony Blair takes six separate helicopter journeys in one day to launch Labour election pledges

"NEW" Labour's north-east "Mafia" has wasted no time arranging a candidate to fill the shoes of another late retiring MP, Derek Foster.

Foster, a former chief whip, has announced his resignation just weeks before a likely general election. This late announcement means it is the party's national executive committee (NEC) that will draw up the shortlist of candidates local members will vote on. Don't expect that list to include those not in favour with the Dear Leader.

Furious and horribly cynical local members suspect that Foster delayed his decision in return for a place in the Lords or on one of the Dear Leader's quangos. We shall see. In the meantime, who does the north-east party "Mafia", leaders of the locally powerful GMB union, its general-secretary Kevin Curran and other fixers in the area such as former European Labour leader turned lobbyist Alan Donnelly, want in Foster's plum Bishop Auckland constituency?

Step forward Joe Docherty, a virtual unknown in County Durham Labour party, who miraculously managed to raise his profile by penning an article for the left-wing *Tribune* magazine on the very day Foster announced he was retiring. In the article Docherty lauded the "progress" made by "new" Labour in the north east and looked forward to the party's spring conference in Gateshead – although the aspiring Docherty didn't manage to make the conference himself.

On paper Docherty has all the right [*sic*] "new" Labour credentials: in the mid-90s he was an assistant to the chairman of Barclays Bank and is now chief executive of the Tees Valley Regeneration Company. However, there may be even darker forces at work determined to ensure that Bishop Auckland, which adjoins the prime minister's Sedgefield constituency, is "sorted" for one of the many deserving special advisers and spin doctors who have all been promised safe berths. Other names doing the rounds among bewildered locals are former Mandelson adviser Patrick Diamond, Downing Street spin-doctor Darren Murphy and prime ministerial speechwriter Liz Lloyd. Local party worthies, it seems, need not apply.

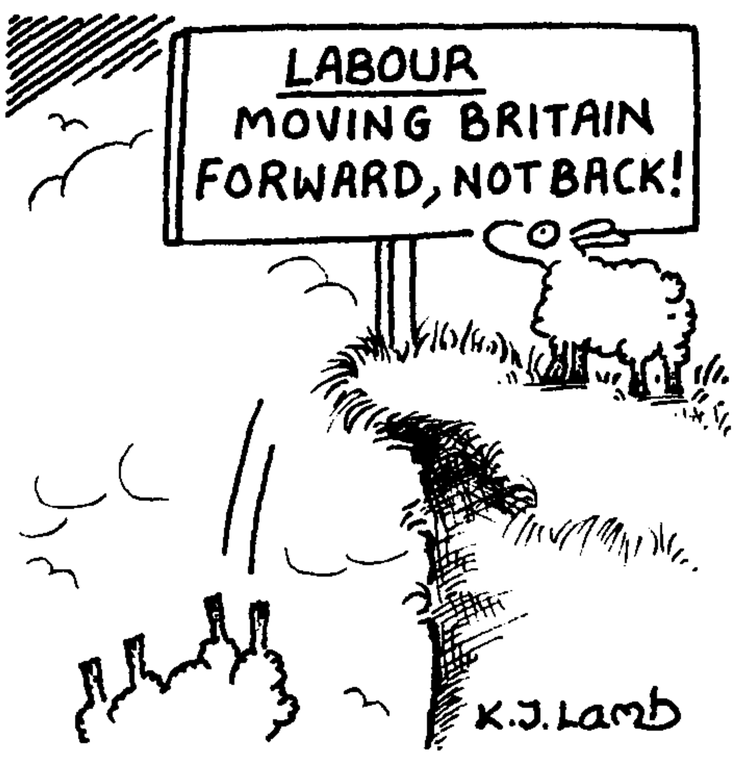
PS: Three days after announcing his retirement, Foster broke his Trappist vows to announce heroically that he thought student tuition fees were "a mistake".

PPS: Foster's late resignation may herald a mini stampede from others keen to secure something for their retirement in return for offering up their safe seats. Insiders expect up to half a dozen MPs may now become "later retirees", including Tony Banks and Helen Jackson.

AT A meeting of the Sir Christopher Wren Luncheon Club a couple of years ago, the guest speaker chose as his subject "Why don't people trust politicians any more?" The speaker was none other than Tory MP Jonathan Sayeed – who has now been banned from parliament for a fortnight and suspended from the Conservative party for a month because of his links to a travel firm offering privileged access to the House for wealthy tourists.

"Mr Sayeed's conduct has fallen well below the standards the House expects," the standards and privileges committee concluded after an investigation, "and risked damaging its reputation." His local Tory association in mid-Bedfordshire is meeting this week to decide whether to deselect him.

The great mystery, however, is why he was ever selected in the first place, since dodgy conduct is nothing new for Sayeed. As the *Eye* revealed as long ago as 1985, he was expelled from school in his sixth-form year for shoplifting – and then ejected from Brighton Poly after being caught cheating in his finals exam.



Number crunching

£100,000

■ Amount the Hamiltons took from Max Clifford in settlement of defamation claims

£100,000

■ Amount the Hamiltons took from Mohamed Fayed to ask parliamentary questions

PRIVATE equity group Apax, run by Gordon Brown's friend Sir Ronald Cohen, has moved even closer to "new" Labour with education secretary Ruth Kelly's choice for the chairmanship of Partnerships for Schools (PfS). The lucky man is Mike Grabiner, another Apax director.

As a joint venture between the department for education and skills (DfES) and Partnerships UK (yet another government-backed PFI "partnership"), PfS's job is to make sure local authorities sign the hundreds of PFI deals that are intended to deliver the government's "building schools for the future" (BSF) programme.

The initiative, launched last year, had a shaky start when the chancellor milked it for all it was worth in his 2004 budget speech, claiming that "by 2015 every secondary school can be refurbished or rebuilt, with world class technology". By the end of the year, however, government sights had been lowered, with the DfES claiming that by 2020 or 2021 every school would have "embarked" on the programme.

Whilst Grabiner, recruited to provide "strategic leadership" to PfS, appears to have no experience of either running or building schools, he does have a track record in making major investments. As chief executive of telecoms company Energis (formerly part of the national grid) during the 1990s, he was in the forefront of the trend for companies to acquire any "new technology" business they could get their hands on, racking up colossal debts in the process. Energis went the same way as the likes of Marconi and, after losing a few hundred million quid on a German internet business, went into administration in 2002, by which time Grabiner had jumped ship. Energis never turned a profit and hundreds of its employees lost their jobs.

PS: Grabiner's boss at Apax, "Ronnie" Cohen, is particularly well-connected at the treasury. As well as having led various government reviews and accompanied the chancellor on his recent trip to Davos, he is, according to reports in the *Sunday Times*, poised to fund a Brown leadership bid. With its chairman so close to Gordon and one of its directors running the schools building programme, the firm looks well positioned to resist moves from some backbench MPs, including treasury select committee chairman John McFall, to bring the secretive world of private equity into the open with proposals such as simply making the firms produce accounts.

IT'S not only the department of trade and industry where lobbyists are being seconded into civil service posts (see last *Eye*), thus cutting out the middlemen in influencing policy.

At the Scottish Executive's rural affairs department, the vital work of "reducing the regulatory burden on the aquaculture industry" is currently being done by a part time secondee… from the Federation of Scottish Aquaculture Producers.

Will he be lobbying himself to remove pollution controls and restrictions on chemicals in fish farming?

"LOCAL residents will have read in the local press that the local MP has had a stroke," wrote Tory candidate Greg Hands in a glossy leaflet shoved through doors in Hammersmith and Fulham.

"It is unusual for political rivals to wish their opponents well, but best wishes for a swift recovery," added the generous-minded soul.

Hm. Hands went on to describe his opponent's health problems in great detail: "Press reports state that the MP has slurred speech and problems with walking" and "he has not made an appearance in the Commons for eight months". And just for good measure, he reminded locals that "Hammersmith and Fulham is the most marginal seat in the country – it will be a close fight at the next election…"

How odd then that Hands didn't find space to actually name the MP and opponent to whom he was sending his best wishes. And will the next edition of *News from Greg Hands* note that Iain Coleman (*for it is he*) has been making a reasonably swift recovery from his minor stroke?

THE government's immigration and nationality directorate has issued instructions to staff on how they will be affected by the freedom of information act, which came into force last month.

The instructions, circulated on the home office's intranet, are preceded by a dire warning: "Staff should on no account disclose any parts of this [document] to anyone outside of a government department."

"There was an Englishman, an Englishman and an Englishman, and the Englishman said, "Begorrah, isn't dat His Holiness the Pope?"

HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE University of Wales, Bangor, is set to dump most of its professional librarians, because looking for information has become "de-skilled" thanks to the internet.

Eight subject librarians are to be made redundant under plans to save £300,000. Only law students will be able to get face-to-face support from a real librarian, rather than a lower paid admin worker. That will leave just four professional librarians, including a "Welsh Librarian and University Archivist", whose job will be to seek external funding for looking after the important document collections.

"The support to the academic and student communities from the qualified subject librarians, whatever its contribution to the teaching and research roles of the institution, is hard to justify in value for money terms at a time when the process of literature searches is substantially deskilled by online bibliographical resources," says a consultation document sent to staff last month.

Apparently "major research resources" are available online, it says, citing the *Dictionary of National Biography* which is a useful reference tool but hardly equivalent to a properly cared for library service.

Lecturers union the AUT says that vital librarians' work, such as training and helping students to use both printed and electronic records in a properly critical manner, will fall to academic staff. Alternatively students will be left to struggle through the quagmire of crap information and porn on the internet to find those "major research resources".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

CORRUPTION inside the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) may have led to lost business for British firms and inflated costs for Serbians rebuilding their war-damaged country.

The agency handles EU aid for the former Yugoslavia, including a £27m contract to overhaul the turbines at the Nikola Tesla power station near Belgrade. French energy firm Alstom bid for this job alongside Britain's Innogy, confidently hoping to win it (Alstom had made some of the equipment that needed renovating and the consortium's bid was the lowest).

However, the British and French embassies sensed something fishy about the contract award, and duly wrote to the Serbian government and the head of the country's electricity generator to express their concerns. These were borne out when a German consortium of Siemens and a firm called Lurgi won with an apparently higher bid.

In January 2003 EAR called in the European anti-fraud watchdog OLAF to investigate possible bribery and suspended a British EAR manager. His identity is known to *Private Eye* although he has not been named openly by EAR. German police raided the Lurgi and Siemens headquarters, and sources close to the investigation suggest that the British EAR manager received around a quarter of a million pounds in suspect payments.

While Lurgi and Siemens both deny charges, the suspended EAR manager resigned and promptly "disappeared", apparently to Africa.

An EAR spokesman told the *Eye* that the power plant work was complete; but while the investigation continued the bids were being judged by a broad panel on "price & quality". However, German investigative journalist Hans Martin Tillack obtained internal EAR documents at the end of last year pointing to "made up" figures and padded contracts from Lurgi and Siemens.

Last Month the European parliament was presented with a report showing *a fifth* of EAR contracts had "anomalies", poor control over payments and a lack of double-entry book keeping.

Down On The Farm

NEW light was recently shed on perhaps the greatest puzzle in British agriculture: the disaster which in recent years has engulfed our dairy farmers.

How is it that the most efficient dairy industry in Europe could have been brought to near-terminal collapse, with thousands of farmers forced out of business every year (numbers have halved since 1997 to below 20,000)? And how is it that supermarkets can squeeze down the going price for milk to below the farmers' cost of production, but then charge customers more than twice what they pay for it?

It doesn't take long for any discussion among farmers to get back to the black day in 1994 when a Tory government abolished the Milk Marketing Board, which could use its monopoly clout to ensure that milk was sold on to the supermarkets at prices which gave farmers a fair price for their product. One of those most active in lobbying the agriculture minister of the day, William Waldegrave, to scrap the board was Chris Haskins, then running Northern Foods, a major milk-buyer. Another, rather more oddly, was David Naish, then president of the NFU. The reason given at the time for bending to their pressure was that it was time for milk production to be opened up to the free market, which would benefit everyone, consumers and farmers alike.

But on a recent edition of the BBC's *Farming Today*, Haskins gave a fascinating new slant on why the MMB was abolished. Asked by Anna Hill whether he would like to see an end to the "state aid rules" which prohibit "monopolistic organisations" (she presumably meant "competition rules"), Haskins replied: "No, because if they are monopolistic within one state that is against the rules of the single market. That is why the Milk Marketing Board had to go ten years ago, because it was a national monopoly, which could use its powers to undermine competition coming in from outside Britain – that is the spirit of the single market."

So there at last it was admitted: the real reason for scrapping the board was that it was in breach of EU law because it protected Britain's dairy farmers against competition from EU rivals.

Under other EU rules, of course – namely the milk quota system – Britain is forbidden to produce as much milk as she consumes, while other countries such as France, Germany and Ireland are allowed to produce a lot more than they can use. The resulting surplus of milk elsewhere in the EU has enabled Britain's supermarkets to buy in cheap, imported milk from abroad, which means they can present British dairy farmers with a knock-down price, take it or leave it, knowing the Milk Marketing Board is no longer there to protect them.

But the news isn't all bad. That keen Europhile Chris Haskins has been elevated to the peerage as Tony Blair's chief adviser on farming matters. He moved on from Northern Foods to become boss of Express Dairies, and when he stepped down from that he was succeeded by his old friend Sir David Naish, who was able to see the firm eventually taken over by the Danish giant Arla. So everyone has come out well – except those 20,000 dairy farmers who have been driven out of business.

'Muckspreader'

Down on the Fish Farm

CELEBRITY chef Jamie Oliver caused uproar when he promoted Sainsburys farmed salmon on TV over Christmas (*Eye* 1122). More than 40 complaints were received by the advertising standards authority (ASA) claiming that the ads were inaccurate and misleading.

The ASA response was unequivocal: "We checked the advertisement in which Jamie Oliver says to the fish farmer: 'What's so good about your salmon then?' The farmer replies: 'Well, as you can see here our fish are fit and healthy because they are in a tidal loch which means they have cold, clear water'. The advertisement is not making claims about salmon as a food. The advertisement is saying that a tidal loch is better for the fish than other farming alternatives, and we don't feel that this is likely to mislead consumers."

The fish farm site featured in the advert, at Loch Hourn in the West Highlands of Scotland, is owned by Marine Harvest (Scotland) Limited, part of the Dutch multinational Nutreco. *Private Eye* has now seen photographs taken below the Loch Hourn cages on 31 December by a team of divers that included a marine scientist. The area below the cages and for a distance of up to 60 metres from the cages is virtually devoid of marine life. It is also littered with discarded feed bags and five-litre metal containers.

Most significant, however, is the proliferation of beggiatoa mat; an internationally accepted sign of sever degradation of the seabed. Beggiatoa occurs at sites of organic pollution, often in areas where there is poor water exchange with the open sea. Low oxygen levels result in death or loss of most mega and macro fauna.

Sainsburys is now reviewing its £45m contract with its advertising agency, Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO Limited, with whom it has worked for 25 years.

'Old Trout'

ITV

The Brits (ITV)

TWENTY-FIVE years of The Brits. Who would have thought it? This strange and faintly offensive annual ritual has survived for several reasons, few of them to do with music.

For one, it's the mouthpiece of the British record industry, an unloved group of companies and individuals who feel they should be given more credit for their considerable achievements, whatever they might be. For another, after many years of quite frightening amateurishness, *The Brits* has become a glitteringly professional product, rather more finely tooled, in fact, than some of the acts it seeks to promote.

And finally, *The Brits* has survived because it is an awards show, and any old awards show can now be guaranteed national primetime TV coverage and fawning press from sad hacks who should know better. It may be a non-event, but it's a non-event attended by celebrities in skimpy dresses, plus Gazza. It will probably outlive us all.

This year's package, given two and half hours on ITV, was the mixture as we have come to expect it. All the hot (ie profitable) bands of the moment were there, and many of them were performing their greatest hit. Old crocks from the distant past hobbled down a pointless plush staircase to present awards. One old crock from the distant past, Sir Robsworth "Bob" Geldof, hobbled down to receive the customary Not Yet Dead award.

Pubescent girls, kidnapped at gunpoint and bussed in especially, screamed and yelled at every opportunity, possibly for release from their manacles. Celebrities, including Gazza, sat in the audience pretending not to notice the TV cameras rammed in their faces. Looking very confused indeed was poor Gazza, or "G-plop", as he has recently renamed himself to disassociate himself from his previous brand. Perhaps he was trying to work out who that mouthy, familiar-looking red-haired man was on the stage.

This of course was Chris Evans, undertaking the latest of his many comebacks. Shimmering with self-regard, the ginger nightmare presided over a plethora of overlapping awards with an enthusiasm so uncompromising it might almost have been genuine. He was actually an ingenious choice by *The Brits*' producers. A sense of danger continues to surround Evans, for there is always the possibility when a camera is pointing at him that he may do something very naughty indeed. But this wasn't live – even when he said "bullshit" it was bleeped. And Evans was clearly so desperate for the gig he was happy to say any old guff the music industry wanted him to say. The occasion is, after all, an exercise in marketing and little else.

Joss Stone, the comely white soul queen from Devon, he announced as "one of the jewels in the UK music industry's crown". The Scissor Sisters, who are American, were "a band signed and nurtured here in the UK." Coked-out executives looked on in approval. Evans's one moment of inspiration came when he suddenly yelped: "Welcome back to *The Brits* – an award show that actually means something!" and grinned devilishly, as though challenging you to contradict this blatant untruth. Otherwise, though, he followed the corporate line, as everybody must who wants to be involved with *The Brits* next year.

Events like this have their own momentum. Such vast amounts of money are spent on the show that almost everyone who performs looks good, and the worldwide distribution of the programme gives the acts a rare chance to infest foreign territories with minimal effort. Scissor Sisters had animatronic puppets, Lemar and Jamelia a gospel choir, and even Daniel and Natasha Bedingfield – performing together for the first time in public! wow! – were given a string section, despite being unable to sing.

But there's a terrible void at the heart of the event, possibly because this is the only awards ceremony that explicitly rewards commercial rather than artistic achievement. Even the Oscars pretend they are honouring the best film of the year, rather than just the one the most people have seen. Still, this emphasis on cash over culture fits very neatly on Charles Allen's exciting new ITV, where this year's programme was sponsored by MasterCard. And they wonder why "the kids" don't buy music any more.

'Couch Potato'

DUMB BRITAIN

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Wright: How many days are there in five weeks?

Contestant: Don't know.

Wright: Give it a guess.

Contestant: Sixty.

BBC Radio Devon

Matt Woodley: Name the artist born in 1776 in East Bergholt, Suffolk, whose paintings include The Hay Wain and Chain Pier, Brighton?

Contestant: Van Gogh.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Mount Everest is in the autonomous Chinese region of Tibet and which other country?

Contestant: Nicaragua.

DUMB NEW ZEALAND

MoreFM, Christchurch, NZ

Presenter: What's another name for Cosa Nostra?

Contestant: Ummm... Amnesty International?

HOW TO Sleep BETTER ZZ
AND BY FAR THE EASIEST WAY...
IS TO MAKE SURE...
YOU WATCH PROGRAMMES WITH ROBERT WINSTON IN THEM
Z Z Z
Z Z Z
Ken Pyne

AD NAUSEAM

WHAT news of the *Telegraph*'s much-hyped "Read a bestseller everyday" campaign?

Its success was such that not only is the newspaper about to drop its creative agency, CHI, but it's abandoning brand marketing altogether. Before you reach for the champagne, however, the replacement is expected to be yet more promotions.

THE PR coup of the last fortnight was, of course, B&Q's: not for its sponsorship of Ellen MacArthur's round-the-world record, but for the story the next day across all newspapers in which Gerry Murphy, chief executive of B&Q owner Kingfisher, boasted that his company's £10m investment in MacArthur had yielded £100m of free media.

This mysterious figure emanated from Kingfisher itself. Which means its marketing department achieved the enviable feat of grabbing acres of free publicity by placing a story about, well, how much free publicity it had grabbed.

FORD's new campaign for the relaunched Focus, in which a preening fashion designer is taken aback by the luxury on offer in the humble motor, is already a contender for this year's most nauseating TV ad.

It's probably mere misfortune that the campaign appeared at the same time as Ikea's latest, which also features a puffed up designer. But to borrow a well-known tagline for the car's poster campaign is simply careless.

"Beware of Expensive Imitations" says the ad – ironically, we may presume, as this is itself a crass facsimile of Sekonda watches' famous 80s slogan, "Beware of Expensive Imitations." Understandably Sekonda objected but only received a po-faced letter from Ford's agency, Ogilvy.

"We don't accept the suggestion that we have copied your advertising campaign," said Ogilvy's business director Ivan Mason, noting correctly, if imperiously, that there is no copyright on strap-lines unless they are trademarked. He went on to add: "The differences in the campaign, aside from the strap-line, are vast." Well, only "vast" in that one ad is for a watch and the other a car.

AUDI is also guilty of car-balls with its poster for the new A4.

The full-page press ad shows the elements of the periodic table, listed with their corresponding atomic numbers. At the end is the fictional element VdT, for Vorsprung Durch Technik, which is given the largest atomic number of 120.

Audi's agency, BBH, appears unaware that elements with atomic numbers above 103 tend to be unstable and decay spontaneously.

"WE NEVER underestimate the importance of local knowledge," boasts the multi-million pound advertising campaign in which HSBC claims to be "the World's Local Bank".

Unless, that is, you work in the bank's call centre in Hyderabad, central India, where workers have taken on many jobs that were previously based in the UK. A large plaque beside the main entrance warns employees that "you are entering an English speaking zone".

IKEA's marketing department showed uncanny prescience on the day its new store opened in Edmonton, north London, sparking crowd surges, heat exhaustion, abandoned cars on the North Circular and several hospitalisations.

At the same time the company was running bus-side ads with a quote from its haughtily dismissive spoof designer "Van den Puup". It read "More Low-Price Design Unpleasantness. Ikea Edmonton opens 10th February." And lo, unpleasantness duly ensued.

MEDIA NEWS

ITV chief executive Charles Allen's spectacular toadying towards Ofcom has finally paid off.

The regulator has decided that ITV can ditch half its "non news" regional programming and spend the money saved on networked, downmarket trash more "attractive to advertisers".

Happily for Allen, the definition of "non news" is elastic. There will be fewer documentary programmes on local stories, for example, and fewer current affairs slots with local angles. Instead, much more cash will be spent promoting the likes of *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here!* – music to advertisers' ears.

Ofcom insists it is asking ITV to invest more cash in programmes produced in the regions. But relieved of any public service burden, these will be neither factually based nor about the regions themselves.

PRODUCERS of Radio 4's *Moral Maze* have been told to ditch Michael Gove, *Times* columnist and prospective Tory parliamentary candidate, in favour of someone "less political".

He has been replaced by, er, Bruce "the Brute" Anderson, the enthusiastic, highly political Tory bruiser.

WHEN BBC director-general Mark Thompson announced in December that 1,800 BBC staff would relocate from London to Manchester, staff started fretting about such piffling issues as their mortgages and the effects on their children of changing schools.

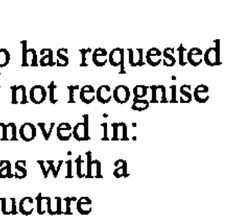
Such worries resulted in the creation of the grandly-titled Manchester Futures Group, an inter-departmental think-tank set up to tackle the issues the move raises. A recent email circulated by a senior editor based in Shepherd's Bush reveals the group's most pressing concerns: "How can the physical environment reflect an ambition to innovate constantly? How do you make innovation an ethos and not a process? How might we change our measure of value to reward innovation?"

Other issues on which the group has requested "feedback" suggest that locals may not recognise their own town once the BBC has moved in: "How do we root innovation in areas with a 'factory' mentality? How do we structure Manchester to encourage innovation?" and most alarmingly, "What do we **call** the Manchester centre to signal a different ethos?" The *Eye* suggests "London" as a title that might keep everyone happy.

THIS month will see the debut on ITV of *Gerry Anderson's New Captain Scarlet*, a CGI-updated version of the 1960s marionette series, which the *Thunderbirds* creator promises will be "darker and sexier" than the original.

It will also reveal for the first time the first name of Scarlet's nemesis and chief agent of the evil Mysterons, dedicated to taking over the world: his full title is Captain Conrad Black.

BIRTSPEAK



AN entertaining row has broken out at the BBC following an announcement by "change leader" Katherine Everett that "we've been looking at how we can do things differently and how we might take money from low value activities to high value activities".

A number of curious BBC staff have demanded to know exactly which of their jobs she considers to be a "low value activity".

"My view is that it's not for us (whoever 'we' are) to say what the low value activities are; it's for teams to judge for themselves… Here in the change team we are asking ourselves how we could work more simply, and how we identify and stop doing low-value activity – we'll let you know where we get to," revealed Everett, desperate to avoid further confrontation.

LISTENERS to Kelvin MacKenzie's TalkSport radio station are often treated to the stern law 'n' order views of presenter Mike Parry. Last week he was at it again, demanding punishment of the utmost severity for footballers who behave yobbishly on the pitch.

Parry is well qualified to take a hard line on loutish conduct. In 1989, as news editor of the *Daily Express*, he had to be pulled apart from the *Daily Star*'s deputy news editor Paul Smith, when a "Farewell to the Black Lubyanka" party ended in fisticuffs.

The following year he managed to get arrested by Italian police while attending the world cup, following a tired-and-emotional fracas with a sports hack. After being denounced by Parry as "scumbags", the *carabinieri* also confiscated his passport.

On a freebie trip to Moscow a couple of years later, Parry almost came to blows with Richard Littlejohn and several other hacks when they accused him of filing a bogus story. And in May 1996, at the football writers' annual dinner in London, he drunkenly invited *Sunday Times* sportswriter Joe Lovejoy to "step outside". Lovejoy duly did so – and within seconds Parry was on his back, nursing a bloody lip.

How fortunate for Parry that his previous employers – who include the *Sun* and the Football Association – didn't take the zero-tolerance attitude to thuggery now advocated by TalkSport's outspoken presenter!

POPEYE

PETE Doherty's liaison with model Kate Moss elevated him from part-time singer and full time drug addict to A-list celebrity. But coverage of his subsequent travails has glossed over the role the press itself has played in his predicament.

Since being kicked out of his band the Libertines in 2003, a significant part of Doherty's income has come from deals for exclusive interviews with papers about his drug habit. In May 2004 the *Sun*'s Victoria Newton "tracked the missing star down to his London hideout" to persuade him to tell her all about his "£250 a day drug habit". But by July his price had obviously gone up: the *Sunday Mirror* shelled out for an exclusive in which Doherty informed them that "I fork out £1,000 a day on heroin".

The paper presumably assumed its readers would have forgotten about the singer's "drug hell" by 30 January this year, when it devoted its front page to "chilling photographs" of the "pathetic fool chasing the dragon" – pictures it had acquired from documentary maker Max Carlish, who had spent time with Doherty last summer during a less bankable period of his career.

Carlish also sold the photos to the *News of the World*, which demanded that Kate Moss "Look at this picture of your new lover smoking heroin, and for God's sake, junk this junkie" (though since she has presumably witnessed such scenes in real life, it was unclear why some second-hand photos should do the trick) and the *Sun*, which sternly instructed its readers that "if you think drugs are cool, look at these pictures… what's happened to him could so easily happen to you."

By Thursday, however, even as the *Mirror* carried its own "exclusive" chat with Doherty ("Kate's my salvation"), he had been arrested on assault charges. And who was the man he was claimed to have beaten up and robbed? Max Carlish, the man who had made an estimated £30,000 by selling pictures of him to the tabloids the previous weekend (and who is alleged to have agreed to split the profits with the junkie himself).

Doherty spent four nights in Pentonville emerging last Tuesday into the welcoming arms not of Kate Moss (who has never actually confirmed that she has even met him) but of "the *Sun*'s Sean Hamilton, the reporter who knows him best", promising for at least the fourth time in the pages of that newspaper that he was "determined to stay clean". "Pete Doherty received no fee for this interview," the paper pointed out, "but The Sun has paid a £12,000 rehab bill to help him beat his addiction – and to highlight the perils of drugs to thousands of young music fans." Perhaps, given the role it played in the incident, the paper and its rivals should also contribute some of the £150,000 bail that proved such a problem for Doherty's record company.

The affair reached its messy conclusion (at least for the moment) last weekend when Doherty, under pressure to provide hard evidence that he had ever spent more than five minutes in Moss's company, handed over a set of pictures taken on his mobile phone to the *Sun*. "Ex-Libertines frontman Pete, 25, showed us the snaps from his London rehab clinic last night," reported the paper. "He even allowed us a peek at the tender text messages he has swapped with 31-year-old Kate." This, apparently, was the final straw for Moss, and Valentine's day brought news that she had "dumped" the singer – revealed, naturally, exclusively in the *Sun*, which seemed to have developed something of a goldfish memory about the pictures' provenance.

"We printed them in good faith to prove his love for Kate," bleated Sean Hamilton. "He has since insisted a friend stole his phone and handed them over behind his back."

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Is good taste the new vulgarity?" — Tina Brown, *Washington Post*.

"Is self-restraint the new self-indulgence?" — Tina Brown, *Washington Post*.

"Is modesty the new bombast?" — Tina Brown, *Washington Post*.

"Ferocity is the new niceness." — Hilary Alexander, *Today* programme.

"History is the new cooking." — *Guardian*.

"Banking is the new shopping." — HSBC recruitment ad.

"Incommunicado is the new connectivity." — *Irish Times*.

"Virginity, it seems, is the new black. Or at least the new Michael Jordan trainers." — Gaby Wood, *Observer*.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SEX AND THE CITY'S SARAH JESSICA PARKER MARKETS HER BRAND NEW PERFUME
PERFUME DEPT
JUST A LITTLE SQUIRT
BUYER
YES I AM, ...BUT I'VE DONE QUITE WELL FOR MYSELF!
BUYER

DOING THE ROUNDS

HOLDING an election near the end of the financial year was never going to be great news for health secretary John "Oh Fuck Not Health" Reid, as indebted hospitals are forced to close wards in an attempt to break even. With trusts facing a combined deficit of half a billion, the potential for political embarrassment is huge. Alas, things can only get worse for Reid as the major planks of his reform programme are all going tits up at the same time.

Payment by results (PBR), an attempt to introduce a strict market discipline to the NHS, has been dramatically downscaled this year, when it was spotted that it could precipitate a "catastrophic £1.5bn imbalance" across the NHS. It has been trialled across the board in foundation hospitals, who weren't anticipating an average 11 percent rise in emergency admissions via A&E in the first six months of the year. They should have done, since it was a direct consequence of having to meet the government's absurd **four-hour waiting time target**. Primary care trusts were then faced with a huge increase in PBR bills. According to the audit commission's Andy McKeon, had this fiasco been rolled out across the NHS, "it would have proved deadly for NHS finances."

Instead, it has just proved deadly for **foundation hospitals** such as Bradford, which saw admissions rise 21 percent and disputes with local PCTs about costing and billing for this extra emergency work. The subsequent refusal to pay up helped tip the trust into financial crisis. In "new" Labour's market system, many hospitals (foundation or otherwise) have a grim future. They are hideously expensive to run and maintain, and face unfair competition from **independent treatment centres (ITCs)** for their lucrative elective surgery.

The **new consultant contract** has cost large hospitals £3m to implement, and most lack the financial expertise to survive under the stringent rules of foundation status. Despite the extra billions disappearing into the NHS, Bradford, faces a £11.3m debt and proposed a freeze on recruitment, 230 redundancies and closure of four operating theatres and an elderly care unit. This failed to satisfy the regulator, who claimed it "did not demonstrate a proper appreciation of the seriousness of the predicament" and forced out the chair, John Ryan. Many hospitals are now ducking out of the pointless charade of foundation status.

None of this market failure is helped by the chaos in **PCT commissioning.** The quality of this is "bad and getting worse" according to a survey of trust chief executives in the *Health Service Journal*. Individual PCTs lack expertise and will be forced to merge to the size of the old district health authorities, while individual GP practices will pool their resources and become "multifunds".

In eight years, "new" Labour has recreated the NHS market that was left behind by the Tories.

Its success is largely dependent on the multi-billion pound **NHS IT programme**, which has yet to come up with a useable "**choose and book**" system. According to the national audit office (NAO), one in four PCTs will miss the government's key target of offering patients a choice of four or five different "providers" for their surgery by the end of the year.

Even more depressing for Reid are the results of the **Evercare** pilot, a model imported from America to look after the elderly at home. Even with "favourable assumptions", it would cut the emergency admission rate by only 1 percent. Finally **prevention of illness,** as outlined in the **public health white paper**, is being sidelined according to the King's Fund, because there are very few incentives to make it work.

So what do patients make of their massive investment in the new NHS? The **healthcare commission** now expects to receive 9,000 complaints by the end of its first year, double the number anticipated, and is spending up to £1m on hiring a private company, Huntswood, to cope with the backlog at £500 a case.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

AH, YOU'RE BACK WITH US, MR SMITH...
YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO KNOW THE OPERATION WAS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS...
WE MANAGED TO FIT THE CHEAPER VALVE RATHER THAN THE MORE EXPENSIVE ONE
HEART

SIGNAL FAILURES

High-speed spin

WITH an election approaching and railways still a mess, transport secretary Alistair Darling organised a conference to tell everyone things were looking up.

Governments used to divert attention from their incompetence by announcing a big rail scheme at election time. But for "new" Labour, it's enough just to promise that the north-south high-speed line (HSL), which was recently rubbished by Darling, will in fact be *considered*. The press dutifully gave the impression that HSL was on the cards and forgot to challenge Darling's preposterous claim that the government had concentrated on fixing the railways' problems.

Darling is condemning HSL to the black hole of endless studies (where Thameslink 2000, Crossrail, the Oxford-Cambridge railway and countless light-rail schemes have vanished). He said: "We need to consider whether it is better to spend money on improving conventional lines or building new ones."

A feasibility study on HSL was delivered to the government just two years ago by consultancy firm Atkins. It concluded: "There is a good transport case for HSL… there is a good business case for HSL… it is capable of delivering greater net benefits than other rail or highway schemes." So Darling wants *another* study to consider if the concept's worthwhile.

Even if Labour eventually accepts the concept, HSL is incompatible with public-private partnerships. The Channel tunnel rail link (CTRL) PPP fell apart and had to be funded by taxpayers (including a recent £402m donation for a wildly expensive train depot in Stratford). If HSL is viewed as a business opportunity rather than public infrastructure, the project will be based on premium fares (up to 35 percent higher than the sky-high fares already charged by Virgin, if CTRL commuter trains are any guide). Travelling on HSL will be even less affordable to the majority than today's ordinary Virgin tickets are, and the MPs, civil servants and others using it on expense accounts would be too few to cover the costs involved. So the project could be unviable purely because of PPP dogma – just like the tram schemes squashed by Darling (*Eye* 1112).

Fast railways in France and elsewhere are designed to complement and relieve the wider transport infrastructure. That only works if a huge share of the market switches to the new trains, so fares must be competitive with cars and planes. Major public funding is justified because the old mainlines can take far more local, regional and freight trains; the impact on road congestion can avert big spending on new or wider highways.

In addition, the environmental benefits of electric trains over road vehicles and planes that guzzle oil and accelerate global warming also help justify public funding. But they're irrelevant to "new" Labour because Tony Blair doesn't care enough about the environment to risk upsetting the road and air lobbies.

SO FAR the national audit office (NAO) has ignored the murky world of rail franchising, despite the poor service it provides in return for rocketing subsidies and fares. But now it's to investigate Connex being stripped of its south-eastern franchise in 2003.

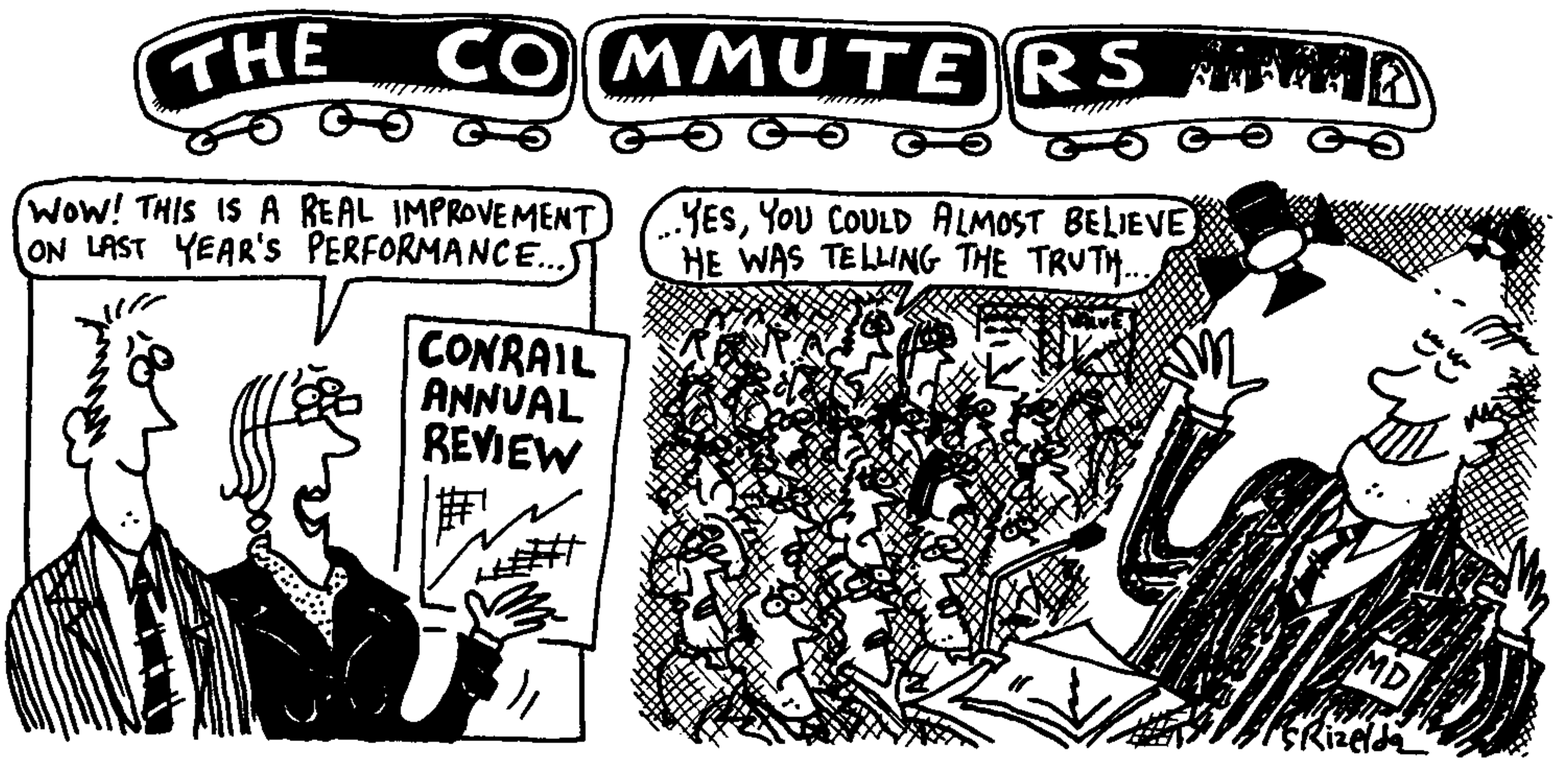
It's an odd case to start with when official figures show that subsidy *fell* and punctuality *improved* after Connex departed (see last *Eye*). Perhaps when it's finished the investigation, the NAO will look at the 400 percent subsidy rise at South West Trains; the massive bailouts to Virgin Trains while all other companies have been excluded from years of secret negotiations over Virgin's franchises; and the cost of transferring Silverlink's Northampton-Birmingham services last year to Central Trains, which will pass them back to Silverlink when it's abolished next year.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"We have invested £7.5bn of our money upgrading the west-coast mainline and suddenly performance drops. That can't be right." – Transport minister Tony McNulty, BBC News, 7 February.

"Before privatisation… people used to be getting a Morris Marina service, now they are getting a BMW service." – Virgin Trains spokesman, *The Independent*, 7 February.

'Dr B. Ching'


THE COMMUTERS
WOW! THIS IS A REAL IMPROVEMENT ON LAST YEAR'S PERFORMANCE...
CONRAIL ANNUAL REVIEW
..YES, YOU COULD ALMOST BELIEVE HE WAS TELLING THE TRUTH...
MD
S Rizelda

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

OLYMPIC BID

LORD Herman Ouseley's upcoming report on racism in the London borough of Southwark is unlikely to make comfortable reading for Lib Dem leader Nick Stanton or chief executive Bob Coomber.

Among other bad odours, Ouseley has sniffed something fishy in recent changes to school transport in the borough. Until the beginning of this term, 220 special needs children were taken to and from schools by Ruskin private hire, a local company with an exemplary record. But before Christmas the £20m contract was transferred to Olympic South, a minicab company based miles away in Merton.

Olympic began operations in the borough illegally on 6 January, for its vehicles were not licensed to carry more than eight passengers. On 28 January Olympic began removing seats from minibuses to comply with the law, after being reported to the transport commissioner. That morning dozens of children missed school and others were hours late. Head teachers and parents had already complained about Olympic's service before the licence issue arose.

Roger Lynch, boss of Ruskin private hire, has alerted the district auditor to alleged irregularities in the way the contract was awarded. He claims Olympic's financial position was not checked and it didn't fulfil a tender requirement for an operator to have a depot in the borough.

Olympic's controlling shareholder, Tony Howard, has a substantial financial interest in Tooting & Mitcham Football Club. By coincidence, the council officer dealing with the operation of Southwark education passenger transport, Alan Husband, is also involved in Tooting & Mitcham FC. In another unfortunate coincidence, given that the Ouseley report is imminent, Ruskin is a black-owned company, while Olympic is white.

Council leader Coomber has set up an inquiry into the affair. Progress has not been helped by the theft of a computer which stored most of the correspondence and emails relating to the schools transport bids. Curiously the thief, who apparently used a key to enter council offices, ignored much better machines in the same room.

CHICKEN-LICKEN

THE LIES are flying thicker than chicken feathers as Richmond's Tories get in a tangle over *Eye* 1124's story about the council's attempts to intimidate the volunteers of an independent community website.

Richmond's PR boss Alex Aiken – a former Central Office spin doctor who famously wrestled a *Mirror* hack dressed as a giant chicken to the ground during the 1997 election campaign – had taken a dislike to richmond-online.co.uk. Website volunteers claimed that press officers were rude and uncooperative and that Aiken had contacted the employers of some volunteers to put pressure on them to end their involvement.

"A scurrilous piece, even by *Private Eye*'s standards," declared council leader Tony Arbour. "No truth whatsoever... pack of lies", etc. Alas it is Cllr Arbour who seems to be the purveyor of porkies here, for the *Eye* has seen a letter from Richmond's chief executive, Gillian Norton, to one of Aiken's victims, confirming that he had indeed called the volunteer's employers to ask whether it was "compatible" for public service employees to do voluntary work with community websites.

The volunteer told the *Eye*: "It put me through five weeks of intense worry and it put my job, pension and professional future, at risk." Fortunately the volunteer's employers eventually told the chicken-wrestling buffoon to cluck off.

SNOUT OF AFRICA

THE DEPUTY mayor of Lewisham, Gavin Moore, Labour colleague Pauline Morrison and five council managers went on an important nine-day "twinning" trip to South Africa last year.

Although the jaunt to Ekurhuleni – the municipal authority for the area around Johannesburg – took place last October, details have only recently come to light following questions to Lewisham mayor Steve Bullock from Mark Morris, leader of the Lib-Dem opposition.

Council taxpayers will foot the £16,560 bill for the jaunt, made up of £4,230 for accommodation and £12,330 for flights. Six of the party, including Moore and Morrison, flew business class while one officer roughed it in economy.

Morris asked for details of the itinerary, and whether it and the cost of the tickets were approved by the chief executive. Bullock's answer failed to give many details of the itinerary and completely omitted to mention that six of the party had been on a two-day safari to the Pilansberg national park on the weekend of 23-24 October.

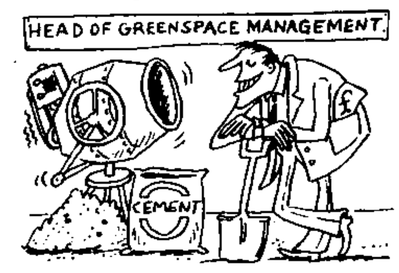
When asked by the *Eye* who paid for the safari, a council spokesman said "all costs of the safari, including travel and accommodation have been paid for in full by the participants themselves". For "have been", read "have *now* been". Moore was initially reluctant to cough-up his share, his hand being forced by Morrison, who paid before the thumbscrews were applied, and Morris's pesky questions.

● WE KNEW Doncaster mayor Martin Winter was unpopular, but was it really necessary for his office to demand a full "security sweep" of a primary school before the great man's visit to talk to the kiddies? In the event Winter's office backed down in the face of the school head's astonishment and ridicule. Meanwhile his chances of survival in office have taken an unwelcome boost following a meeting of leading opposition figures to try to agree on a credible single candidate to stand against him in May. Alas the Lib Dem, Independent and Community Group bigwigs couldn't even agree if the mayoralty was a good idea or not. Local "millionaire" Martin Williams would only back any candidate who promised to let him be deputy. Market traders' boss Mick Maye thought they should all throw their weight behind the best candidate – who happened to be himself. A window of hope opened when popular union official Doug Wright announced his intention to run. However, it banged shut when he said he would be standing for the Sir-I-Salute-Your-Indefatigability Party (known to some as Respect). So the egregious Winter looks set to hang on by default.

FLOOD OF COMPLAINT

DEVELOPERS want to build 2,600 houses on the floodplain of the River Mole around Horley, Surrey, north of Gatwick airport.

It suits most councillors on Tory Reigate and Banstead borough council (R&BBC) because, while satisfying John Prescott's plans to concrete over much of the south-east, it keeps a large development out of their corner of the borough; it suits Surrey county council because it owns much of the land and will make a handy profit; but it worries the hell out of existing residents who fear that flooding in the area will be made much worse if hundreds of acres of farmland disappear.



At a public inquiry into the "Horley Master Plan" in 2001, an inspector ruled that more work should be done on the risk of flooding. Well, now it has been. The Environment Agency (EA) has used an expensive computer model to show that, while Horley is ringed by a flood risk zone, the very areas to be built on are safe. What a relief!

The EA says there aren't adequate records of previous floods – although residents point to photographs of the proposed site under several feet of water in 1968, when one person died and residents had to be rescued by troops.

At a meeting of the R&BBC executive on 3 February Cllr Lynne Hack tried to reassure objectors by saying that all the houses will be raised up and service points such as electrics will be above 1968 flood levels, so "only the gardens will flood". So that's all right, then!

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

A NEW rail route to Glasgow airport is the latest project to cast doubt on the Scottish Executive's commitment to encourage youngsters to be more active: it slices through a historic playing field and destroys football pitches.

A mile of track would be laid through the St James Park fields in Paisley if Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) goes ahead with the £140m plan as it stands. More than 20 alternative routes have been considered, but going through the park avoids the more expensive options of demolishing buildings.

Exactly how many pitches will be lost is uncertain. SPT says it will be between four and seven, once the layout is rearranged; local campaigners say as many as 18 of the 22 pitches could be unusable once trains are running through the park. At weekends all the pitches are currently in use by dozens of clubs for youngsters.

Once plans are finalised, planning permission will be down to Renfrewshire council which has promised to study whether the route brings a "sufficient transport benefit" to the west of Scotland. SPT will have to have a good look at its statistics if it hopes to convince on this score. One thing campaigners, including local coaches and the Scottish Youth Football Association, find particularly galling is that Scottish Executive figures on who will use the rail link are so low. They estimate 500,000 passengers in the first year – an average of just 15 people per train trundling across the fields.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

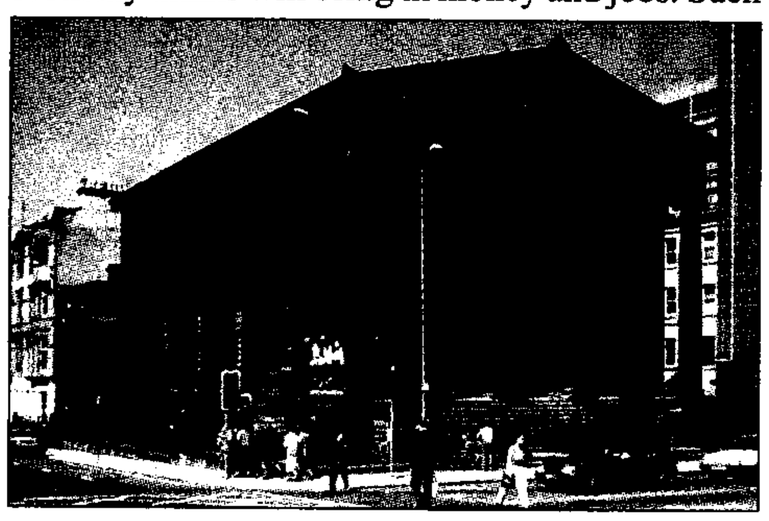
BALLOONS, CHOCOLATES, FLOWERS... SO WHO'S TO BE THE LUCKY VALENTINE?
OH THOSE AREN'T FOR VALENTINE'S DAY
QUIN IS TRYING TO WOO NEXT DOOR'S CLEANING LADY
WE NEED HER DUSTING SKILLS AND WE NEED THEM NOW!

NOOKS and CORNERS

IN *Eye* 1121 I recorded that the former Elgin Place Congregational Church in Glasgow, aka The Shack and Trash night clubs, had "gone on fire" and predicted that the city council would soon clear away the gutted shell. How right I was – alas.

This Grecian temple, built in 1856, was the work of John Burnet and was described by Gomme & Walker as "the purest example of the neo-classic in Glasgow: the purity of the style is doubtless what makes it so satisfying." Its grand Ionic portico added distinction to the surviving stone terraces in Bath Street and made a wonderful foil to Mackintosh's School of Art on the other side of Sauchiehall Street. And now it has gone – condemned by the council's zealous department of building control – with the fine stonework smashed up. After all, it was only listed at grade A – the highest. In any civilized city, the walls and portico would have been retained and re-roofed.

So now the city has another cleared site ready for some cheap commercial building the council foolishly thinks will bring in money and jobs. Such



prodigality with its diminishing stock of listed buildings merely confirms that Glasgow's commitment to culture is a sham. It may have been European City of Culture in 1990 and the Arts Council's City of Architecture and Design in 1999, but all the council cares about is new development and more shops – forgetting that tourists don't come to see modern Glasgow architecture.

Moreover, the council has now had the impudence to apply for World Heritage Site status on account of the handful of Mackintosh buildings it failed to destroy in the 1960s and 1970s. For the Philistine councillors, of course, Mackintosh only means tourism and money – failing to understand that poor Toshie was merely a part of a wider architectural culture that once made Glasgow great and interesting: Thomson, Hamilton, Burnet, Salmon…

So which will be the next neglected grade A listed building in Glasgow that building control will condemn after it has "gone on fire"? I hesitate to make a prediction.

BEING made a City of Culture appears to be a curse as it encourages local authorities to say yes to any new development, regardless of culture and historic buildings. This is certainly the case in Liverpool which is revelling in getting the accolade in 2008.

But now the city's fabric is facing a bigger threat thanks to the office of the deputy prime minister (ODPM), where John Prescott has found more than £500m to back the Pathfinder scheme for "housing market renewal" in areas of declining population and deprivation. This involves the demolition of empty houses, even if they are sound and potentially habitable: in Merseyside, the destruction of some 20,000 homes – mostly brick terraces – and in Liverpool 6,800 houses, including 19th century workers' cottages (one of which is Ringo's birthplace) and larger terraces. Goodness knows where the ODPM gets is expert advice. In Liverpool, after all, if 2008 is to speed regeneration those houses may be needed.

English Heritage has called for "conservation-led regeneration" and points out that in Nelson, Lancs, it has been calculated that the cost of refurbishing a traditional old house is about £38,500 while the cost of replacing it with a new structure and maintaining its typical flimsy structure for 30 years is estimated at £64,000.

Furthermore, there is the matter of the "embodied energy" in an existing structure – something a government which pretends to be worried about climate change ought to be concerned about. The Building Research Establishment calculates that a typical Victorian brick terraced house represents the equivalent of 15,000 litres of petrol. Replacing such houses therefore involves a shocking waste of resources while building unnecessary new ones is environmentally damaging.

In addition, last year the Campaign to Protect Rural England published a carefully researched report,* Useless Old Houses?*, on what to do with Lancashire's "low demand housing and high density heritage". This noted that "the type of housing is not central to low demand problems. Rather, it is deprivation-related factors that cause residential environments to decline… Clearance of high-density terraced housing stock could actually be contrary to sustainable development."

The CPRE concludes: "Even when the majority of homes have been abandoned, comprehensive renewal may be preferable for structurally sound terraces. Concentrating development around existing infrastructure in low demand areas would lead to significant savings on new infrastructure which could be invested far more profitably in tackling some of the root causes of unpopular neighbourhoods."

So why is the government throwing so much money at the Pathfinder schemes when the only beneficiaries would seem to be house builders and a few architects?

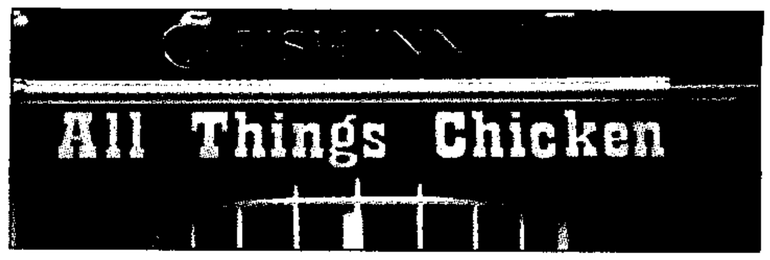
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

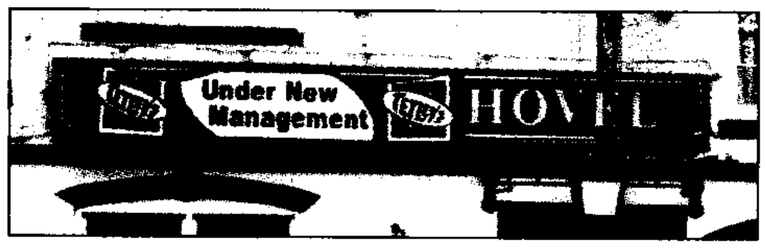
BY BIRCH

She should be careful, getting involved in something superficial and gimmicky
TRACEY EMIN CREATES ARTWORK FOR LONDON
like Fashion.
True...
He's right, you know!
TRACEY EMIN CREATES ARTWORK FOR LONDON FASHION WEEK

I-SPY



Dorchester



The Malt Shovel, Coventry

Submitted by David Jenkins and Robert Gill.
£10 paid for similar submissions.
(SAE required for return of photographs.)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE "surprise" announcement of the royal marriage has sent half the British establishment to their diaries to make sure they're free on 8 April, and the other half into apoplexy lest the PoW becomes less free for *them*.

By *them* I mean the charities that need Charles's help with fund-raising events: not least the Philharmonia Orchestra which right now needs him desperately.

The Philharmonia has just launched its 60th anniversary celebrations, putting on a brave face for a gala opening to the year conducted by its glamorous former boss Riccardo Muti rather than its current sober one, Christoph Dohnanyi.

The band, though, is in a fix. This summer it will lose its home, the Royal Festival Hall, which is closing for a £90m refit scheduled to take a year and a half. That leaves the Philharmonia largely on the road, trying to recoup box-office revenue with concerts in towns like Bedford, Basingstoke and Leicester – not exactly hot spots of the international music circuit.

To maintain a London presence it will squeeze as many concerts as it can into the Queen Elizabeth Hall; but that's a small venue, with too few seats to make real money on orchestral dates. And in the meantime it has failed to persuade the Arts Council to increase its £1.7m grant to help cover the losses. As managing director David Whelton says, it faces a "very tough" time. To a large extent its future viability depends on a 60th anniversary appeal, focused around a gala concert at Buckingham Palace at which HRH is expected to be guiding wealthy hands toward their chequebooks.

Officially it's still happening; but the Philharmonia's phone lines have been busy in the past few days with anxious calls to Clarence House – dressed up as grovelling congratulations, naturally.

There was quite a bit of grovelling the other week at ENO, too, when the company presented its forthcoming season to the press: a literally stage-managed job, with 50 or so hacks arranged in a semi-circle on the Coliseum stage and just one speaker, ENO's MD Sean Doran, spotlit with the darkened auditorium behind him.

It was clearly an attempt to make Doran look like someone with clout as opposed to the well-meaning but weak fall guy for Martin Smith (ENO's all-too-hands-on chairman) that we know him to be. Smith kept a low profile, hiding among the hacks while Doran stumbled through his speech and offered various unconvincing reasons for not having found anyone to take on the job of ENO's music director after more than year of looking.

Alas, it didn't wash. When Doran's speech was over it was time for questions. The first hand that went up asked: "This is one for Martin Smith. When are you going to resign?"

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Bush whacked

Sir,

I object to your snide attack on Mr Bush (Cover, 4 Feb). Iran is busy preparing atom bombs; what would you say if they dropped a bomb on the free world: "sorry"?

Why have you no word of appreciation for the Blair/British democratic election in Iraq – after 50 years of dictatorship they removed to the benefit of us all?

CHARLES SOLOMAN,

York.

Rubbish tips

Sir,

I read with sympathy the problems of Farmer Mike. However, I am scratching my head a bit with respect to the problem the UK has in disposing of hazardous waste (such as batteries and paint tins). I live in Belgium (rated one of the most polluted places in Europe in a recent study). Within three kilometres of the house are two sites for disposing of hazardous waste. I have a house in the south of France in a small village – same story – easy to reach properly organised place to deposit waste of all types (including "hazardous"). These two examples and the easy availability of disposal sites are typical for Belgium, France, Germany, etc. Perhaps the problem in the UK is that central and local government are too idle to get their act together and provide proper waste disposal sites that recycle. Blair talks up a storm about the environment then takes little action. A case of all mouth and no trousers?

Best regards,
MIKE PARR,

Belgium.

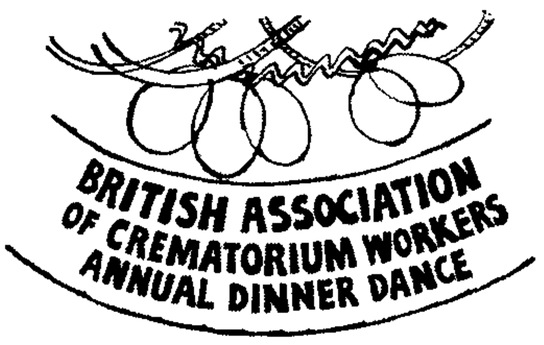
Generation gap

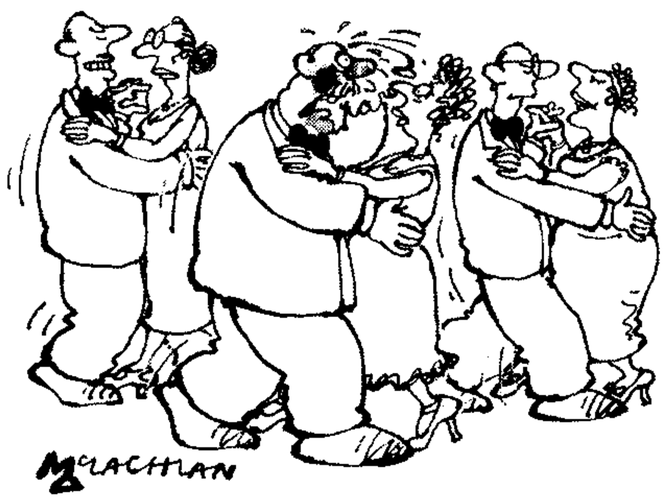
Sir,

I did not "campaign" against Julian Clary hosting the Gen Game because of his sexuality as you claim (Street of Shame, 1125); my objections were based entirely on the unsuitability of his material. Please try and make a better fist of it.

GARRY BUSHELL,

Via email.





"Is it me or is it hot in here?"

Cartoon bombs

Sir,

Regarding your disgraceful cartoon featuring a suicide bomber, I am minded to take out a subscription to your wretched rag so that I may cancel it with immediate effect.

Yours, disgusted of Blackheath,
FRANCIS SEDGEMORE,

London SE3.

Northern light

Sir,

*Come on, chaps! "Comedy" northern accents (Bez Diary), in this day and age! If you carry on like this people will think you're a load of metro-centric public school boys. In the north, like the rest of the country, f*ck rhymes with duck, whilst, I would think, "fook" rhymes with "spook".*

Your most humble northern conscience,
HIRAM J. MERRYWEATHER,

Via email.

Lookalike

Jackson

Mariette

Sir,

In James Ensor's painting, The Intrigue, the artist's sister Mariette is depicted being hounded by a mob which disapproves of her chosen romantic companion. I don't suppose that point is in any way relevant to current events, but Mariette's strong resemblance to Michael Jackson is nonetheless, er, intriguing.

Yours faithfully,
STEVE ELLIS,

London E17.

Latin lesson

Sir,

Here is a contribution for "Pedants' Corner". If you don't have a "Pedants' Corner", it's time you did, and here is the inaugural contribution.

When E. Strobes signs something for Lord Gnome, it is Strobes' name that needs to be preceded by the letters "pp", which means "per procurationem", Latin for "by the agency of".

Yours sincerely,
TONY BROWN,

Delft, Netherlands.

SOLUTIONS

"Total Move Solutions" — *estate agents*

"Total barrier solutions" — *fences*

"Total domestic ventilation solutions" — *window vents*

"Entry Control Solutions" — *turnstiles*

"Loading bay solutions" — *ramps*

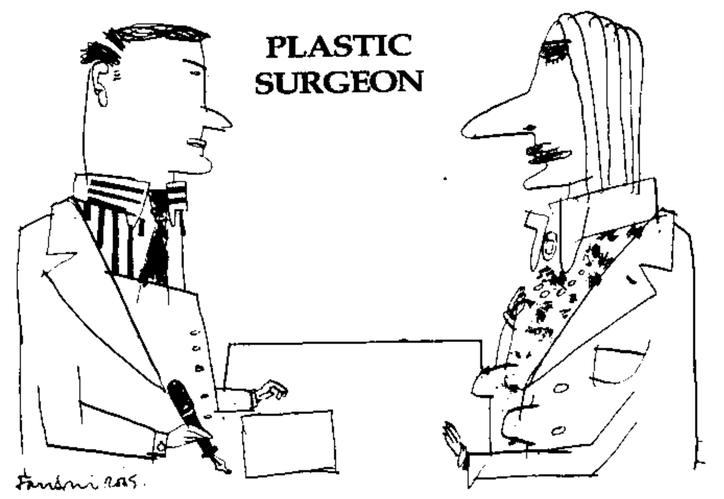
"Shanks Waste Solutions" — *binmen*

"Crew transportation solutions" — *minibuses*

"Thyssen Krupp, the leading access solutions company" — *stairlifts*

All submitted by readers

Scenes You Seldom See



"I'm very happy with my nose. In fact, I'd like you to make it a little bit bigger"

Heneage homage

Sir,

Re: memo from James Heneage. I'm the usual avid reader of your top publication, but found myself extremely disappointed with your poor interpretation of the above. The memo was printed totally out of context. James's directive was to ensure that we did not do the historical act of closing between 4 and 4.30 on Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve is not a public holiday and all staff are contracted to work the allotted hours. This is the first year ever!! that we were asked to consider working until 5.30 if your town/ environment still warranted it (many stores still closed early, not due to booksellers marching out in a militant style, but simply that the local shopping centres closed their car parks).

All staff are aware that any work carried out by them over their allotted hours is instantly rewarded by a higher rate of pay or time off in lieu. When it comes to closing our doors to trading at the end of the day, we have never been a company that uses a tannoy at 5.15, shuts the doors and makes our customers feel uncomfortable. It's an ethos that we've had since 1987.

The anonymous individual who was too gutless to be named, clearly failed to state that although Mr Heneage had forecast a difficult Xmas (although we'll still be nearly a million up on profit compared to last year), he still made sure that every fulltime contracted member of staff received their Xmas bonus of a week's pay.

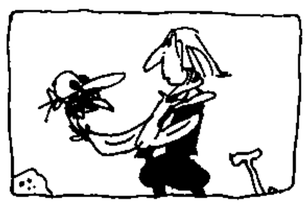
Strangely, I did not see the post-Xmas memo from James thanking profusely everyone for their hard work and that no blame was to be apportioned towards everyone's efforts.

Yours sincerely,
TERRY CLEAVER,

Manager, Ottakar's Portsmouth.

"Come along now, Dr Watson. Haven't you got no Holmes to go to?"

LUVVIES



"It uses up more of you emotionally, spiritually, physically, than any part I've encountered," Redgrave says. "It's like you set out in a boat that's only just seaworthy, which is your own body and understanding and so on, and you are picked up in this maelstrom and dashed against the rocks and battered to smithereens and little bits of you emerge as driftwood..."

CORIN REDGRAVE
The Times (Arts section)

Submitted by Mark Duckworth.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Chris Smith

Sir,

Sorry to come over all Dave Spart on your ass, but I was surprised to read in Eye 1125 about "Chris Smith's confession of his HIV status". To confess implies that being infected by the retrovirus is a sin, the sort of lazy allusion we came to expect in the 1980s from the right-wing press, but that even the Sun seems now to have stamped out. Come down from the pulpit.

Yours,
ANDREW COLLINS,
Reigate.

Sir,

At risk of being nominated for an OBN, I have to defend Chris Smith MP from your sad, right-of-Daily Mail article (Eye 1125).

Chris Smith did not claim to be making any kind of altruistic or "saintly" revelation. He was giving a few reasons that would satisfy readers, who do not surely expect to know all his emotional and personal reasons for "coming out" as HIV positive.

His alternative was to tell the world that the Daily Mail had attempted to blackmail him, and then shamefully "admit" to his positive status. It was professional of him to give the Mail no publicity (either negative or, erm, positive) and the only right thing to do was to talk about it openly and without shame. He will give inspiration to many with HIV; let them decide whether he's saintly.

I thought what you liked was to critique bad and gutter journalism – and it does not come much worse than what you report here of the Daily Mail. Instead you choose to hit a man when he's down.

Yours sincerely,
COLIN TURNBULL,
Via email.

Spoilsport

Sir,

The person who reviewed Ian McEwan's latest novel, Saturday, was clearly not impressed (Eye 1125). However, did they really need to give away a significant part of the ending in their critique?

Yours sincerely,
DR ROBERT BOON,
Taunton.

Lookalike

Clarke **Mask**

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the alarming similarity between Charles Clarke, charismatic home office boss, and the Mask of Agamemnon, king of kings?

Do you think one is descended from the other? If so, how will this affect Turkish or Trojan immigrants?

Yours truly,
MICHAEL MCLOUGHLIN,
Belfast.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

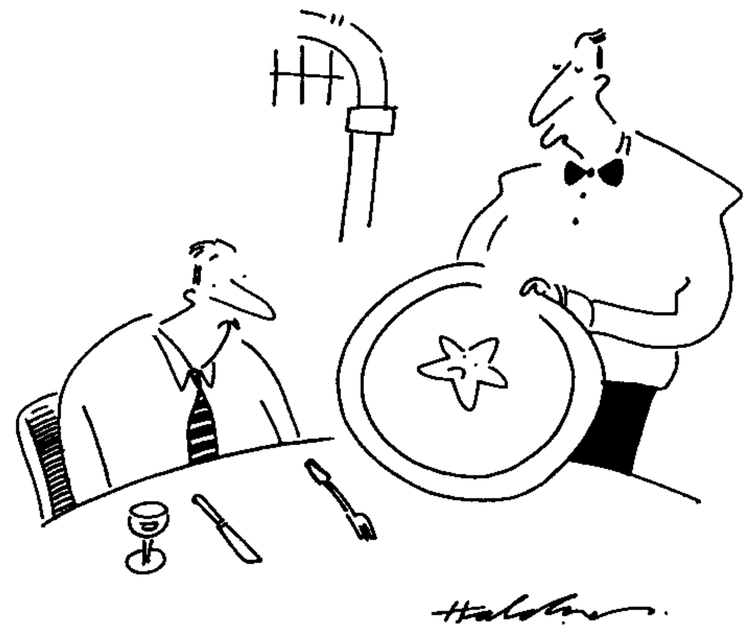
"Sunderland, making a rare soirée into Wolves' territory..."
SIMON CRABTREE, Metro Radio
(V. McNeany)

"The only bad thing about our situation is the situation itself."
GARY MEGSON, Radio 5 Live
(Mark Garnett)

"He [Dunfermline Athletic chairman John Yorkston] just pulled the rugs out from under the players' carpets."
ANDY WALKER, Radio Clyde 2
(Brian Carpy)

"Ian Dowie knows that any points dropped at home are points dropped."
JASON CUNDY, Talksport
(Thomas Ross)

"Bolton are literally encamped on the edge of the box."
LAWRIE SANCHEZ, Radio 5 Live
(Jay Collins)



"Fish of the day, sir"

Sour notes

Sir,

Lunchtime O'Boulez (Eye 1125) has missed an even further-reaching impact of Boosey and Hawkes' decision to relocate its music hire business to Germany and increase hire charges.

As a former (non-professional) orchestra librarian I know that many non-pro orchestras, particularly those who have frequent new repertoire, will not be able to afford the new charges.

Keep up the good work.

RUTH GRACE,
Via email.

Christian values

Sir,

So Ruth Kelly belongs to an organisation that has the objective of its members infusing their work with Gospel values. Eh, isn't that the task of every Christian? Perhaps Christians should be barred from any involvement in teaching. Doing unto others as you would have them do to you is such a terrible business. Indicative of the Messiah's lack of educative experiences, no doubt.

Sincerely,
JOHN TWOMEY,
Via email.

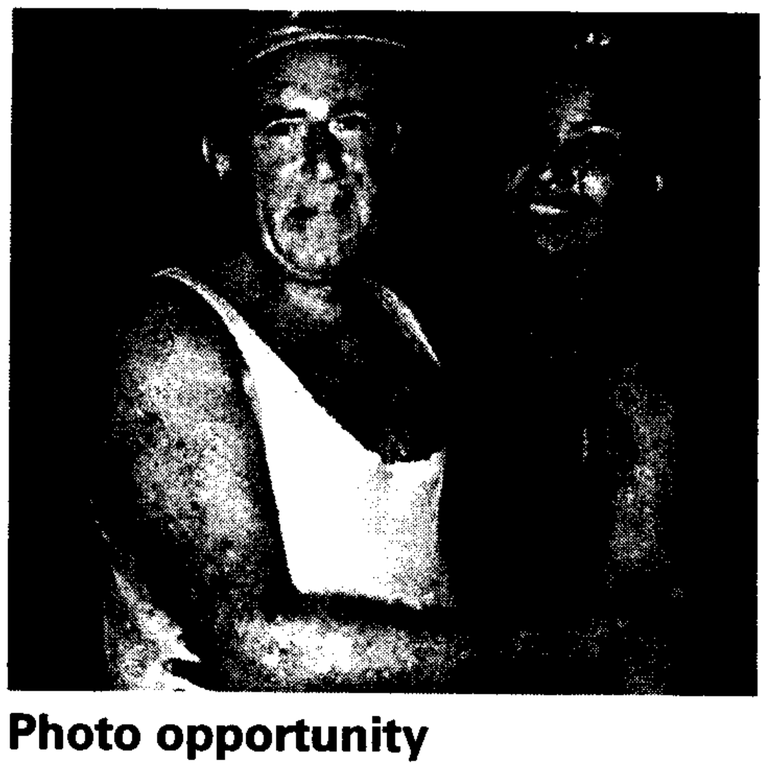


Photo opportunity

Sir,

I would hate to bring it to your attention, but I am burdened so. The recent joyous news of a royal engagement has given rise to the media, scrum-like, to get that vital shot of the happy couple in a locked embrace. This will give papers the licence to saturate their papers for months to come with pictures of this couple.

I wonder whether you could lighten my burden by printing a photo of another couple in a locked embrace, just for some respite? The age difference would be of no issue.

I do hope you can assist me.

Yours in anticipation,
MARIA KEMP,
Glossop, Derbyshire.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

MY ARCHITECT'S WORK IS UNMISTAKABLE.
HIS BUILDINGS HAVE CERTAIN DISTINGUISHING FEATURES.
HERE'S ONE!
UNSAFE STRUCTURE. KEEP OUT

Letter from **Freetown**

from Our Own Correspondent

THERE was a time when Sierra Leone mattered. The world was horrified by the violence of our civil war, when for a decade many of our young rallied to the cause – or were forced to rally to the cause – of Foday Sankoh, a psychotic itinerant photographer, and his Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

Nigerian troops came to bring peace, but did deals with all sides and got rich instead. Britain tried to do it on the cheap, giving the nod to mercenary spivs. When that failed the UN forced our hopeless politicians, who made our country a byword for decay and corruption, to sit down with rebels who would have preferred to slice them up.

When the peace process unravelled five years ago, our former colonial masters finally moved. Britain deployed troops, including the SAS, marines and paras, to end the insanity. Journalists flocked here to observe the mercy mission, churning out bone weary clichés about Hearts of Darkness and the country Graham Greene once left behind.

But the cameras have long since gone; and the hideously maimed survivors of the fighting are still a constant reminder of the trauma we still suffer. In a country where one in four children still dies before the age of four, it is a relief to know $60m could be found for a spanking new court building – a striking glass monument to justice, the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Set up with UN help, the aim was to bring to trial those responsible for the gross atrocities and deliver "swift" and "fair" justice. But many question whether the grand court, with its panel of not quite so grand international judges, is swift or fair.

For a start none of the real villains is in the dock. Sankoh and his equally pschopathic RUF sidekick Sam Bockarie are both dead. Our former military ruler, the unspeakably brutal, Sandhurst-trained Johnny Koroma, is also missing, presumed dead. And Charles Taylor, the former warlord president of Liberia – now officially accused by our truth and reconciliation committee of starting the war and acting as the RUF's principal backer – is a guest of the Nigerian government.

Thus the only big name facing "special" justice is our still serving deputy minister of defence, Chief Sam Hinga Norman. His Kamajor tribal militia, grandly dubbed the Civil Defence Force (CDF), used some fairly robust techniques itself against the rebels – or anyone it thought might be linked to them. Or, in some cases, anyone at all.

But Hinga Norman has been hung out to dry. As the TRC also makes clear, everyone in the besieged government at the time – including president Tejan Kabbah – knew of Kamajor atrocities and did nothing to stop them.

But maybe the fact that there are three defendants from each of the main participants in the war – the RUF, the defecting armed forces and the CDF, is a misguided attempt at "fairness" by the court's chief prosecutor, an obscure US military lawyer called David Crane.

And swift justice? The predicted finish date of July 2005 for the end of the trial and appeal process has been abandoned. With more than 150 witnesses in one case, 250 in another and an average rate of one witness a day and a very short trial year, a minimum five-year estimate is not unrealistic. (Though that might please some of the inexperienced judges enjoying hefty tax free UN salaries and expenses).

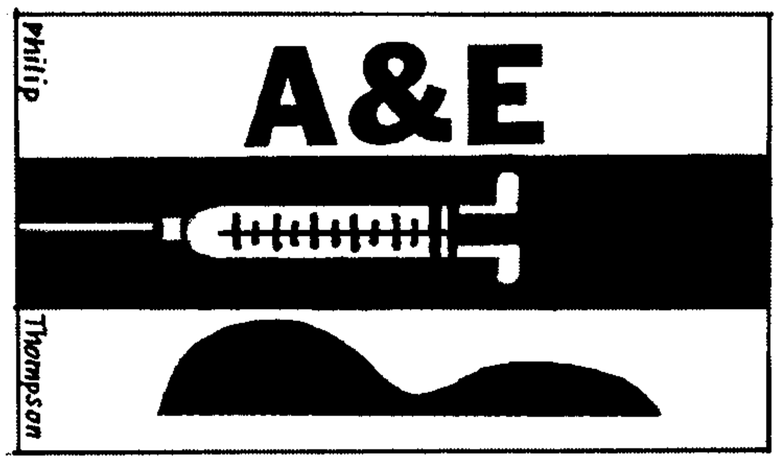
There have been concerns over witness payments, spats between prosecutors – even spats between judges. Of course we need justice. But now we've got a 5,000 page "truth and reconciliation" report pointing a way forward, we can't help thinking a simple murder trial in the restored Victorian court house might have been cheaper.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "She came into the hospital about a week ago, complaining of a headache," Chen Huan-tang of the Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taipei told reporters, "and was referred to one of our acupuncturists. When he told her that one of the needles would be inserted into her left breast, she seemed a little concerned, but said nothing, so the treatment went ahead. Her headache was cured, she went home, and all seemed well until yesterday, when she returned, complaining that her left breast had shrunk from a D-cup to an A-cup. That's when we finally found out about the implants."

Chen then explained how hospital staff had dealt with the unexpected breast reduction in the unnamed woman. "We realised that the small



acupuncture needle must have made a tiny hole in the implant, and that the liquid inside had gradually been leaking out. She said she'd heard a hissing noise and felt damp, but had initially put that down the hot weather. Fortunately, the saline solution that is used in most breast implants is not harmful to the body, otherwise the poor woman would have been in serious trouble. After some discussion, we managed to use a syringe to refill the implant with saline, mixed with a sealant to prevent further leaking. But it took a great deal of effort, and none of this would ever have happened in the first place, if the woman hadn't been too shy to tell us the truth." *(Taipei Times, 13/1/05. Spotter: Richard Hazeldine)*

– ● –

● *"I first noticed the irregular slant of the Ampera bridge last week," Transportation Officer Syaidina Ali told a press conference in Jakarta, "and began to suspect that something was wrong. I also realised that the whole bridge was resonating when heavy traffic passed over it, so I called in Professor Annas Ali, a highway and bridge expert, to conduct tests. He confirmed that the bridge was slanting, but what surprised me was the cause of the problem. After checking the steel pillars that support the bridge, he concluded that one of them was in imminent danger of collapse, because for many years, people had been urinating on its base."*

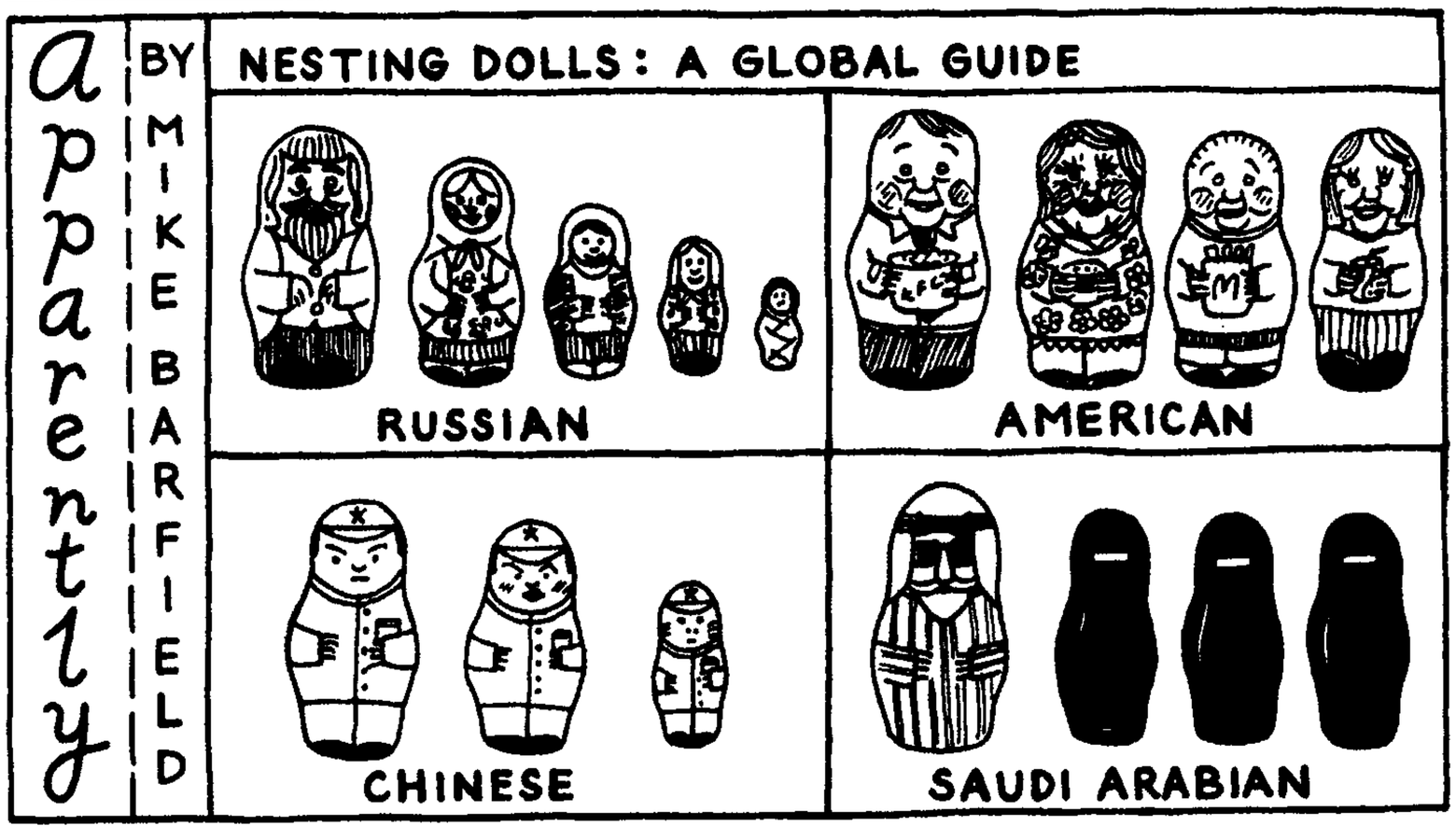
Azmi Lakoni, the head of the city's highway and bridge department, then added further details. "The bridge was built in the 1960s, and for decades it's been a favourite place for motorists to stop and discreetly relieve themselves. One of the pillars has been especially popular, because it cannot be seen from the road, and now it has been weakened by the corrosive force of decades of urine. From now on, vehicles weighing more than one tonne will be forbidden from using the bridge, until we can reinforce the pillar and protect its base against further urine attack. Ideally, we'd like people to stop using it as a toilet, but human nature is very hard to change. And I suppose it's appropriate that the full name of the Ampera Bridge is 'An End to the Suffering of the People'." (Jakarta Post, 29/11/04. Spotter: William Adams)

– ● –

● "When I was stopped by the police checkpoint, I assumed it was for a routine vehicle inspection," David Eisnor told a court in Chester, Nova Scotia. "So I was amazed when one of the cops leant in through my window, pointed to the unopened case of beer and unopened bottles of wine on my back seat, smiled, and said 'this is going to be an expensive night for you.' I explained that I'd just bought it from the drive-thru liquor store in Dartmouth, and even showed them the receipt, but they made me get out of the car, open each of the fourteen bottles one by one, and pour the contents onto the ground. Then, just as I thought things couldn't get any crazier, they told me I had violated part of the Liquor Control Act, and handed me a fine for $445."

Defending the police behaviour in a court hearing demanded by Eisnor, the provincial Crown attorney cited Section 54 (5) of the act, "which says that no person shall possess liquor in a motor vehicle unless it is placed somewhere where they cannot have access to it. We maintain that the driver could have reached round to the back seat, grabbed a bottle of beer, opened it, and then started drinking, which would be an offence. So the officers were quite right to fine him."

However, Attorney General Michael Baker stopped the prosecution, pointing out the absurdity of fining drivers for having alcohol in their cars, when drive-thru liquor stores were legal. "That particular section of the Liquor Control Act is confusing," he declared, "and doesn't clearly address the real issue, which is having opened liquor in the passenger compartment of a vehicle." *(The Daily News [Nova Scotia], 30/11/04. Spotter: M Gary Davis)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

HEY, WE'RE SORRY!!!

What's the hardest word to say in the English language?

I expect some of the children will know the answer!

It's 'sorry', isn't it?

But let me tell you, it's not so hard when you really *are* sorry! You're not just saying it. You're feeling it and meaning it!

Which is where your vicar comes in. Because I recently had to say 'sorry' in public, for something really bad.

Something really nasty that had been done to some good, innocent people who'd been put in prison for something they hadn't done!

You can't get much worse than that, can you?

If ever there was something that cried out for the word 'sorry' in huge letters, this was it!

But, hey, don't get me wrong. This was a long time ago, and this terrible thing happened under a previous vicar of this parish.

I was only a young theology student at the time, trying to make sense of the world, as young people do, strumming my guitar with my youth group, The Third Way (although there were four of us!).

But, and this is the big 'but', even though it had nothing whatever to do with me, I'm big enough to say 'sorry' for it!

And I'm not going to stop there! I'm also happy to go on record issuing a public apology on behalf of another previous vicar, the Rev. Major, for losing all the church's money on a never-to-be-forgotten Wednesday afternoon, when the parish treasurer of the time, Mr Lamont, bet everything on a horse called ERM which fell over at the first fence!

You won't hear the Rev. Major apologising for such an unforgiveable act of irresponsibility!

But, I'm afraid, when we were looking through the parish archives the other day, at the suggestion of my friend Mr Campbell, there it all was in black and white – just what a recklessly stupid vicar the Rev. Major was!

As for Mr Lamont, the presence in the church safe of a pile of receipts from our local branch of Thresher's might suggest that there were other reasons why Mr Lamont's judgement was so poor on that occasion!

But, obviously, I do not want to embarrass Mr Lamont by digging up his private problems!

The important thing is that we should

open up all our parish records for public inspection, which is why any parishioner can now access any event that took place in the history of the parish, right up to as recently as May 3 1997!

That's saying something, isn't it?

So there we have it. I have absolutely no hesitation in putting my hand on my heart and apologising for any mistakes that were made under previous vicars!

Fortunately, the vicars of the future will be spared having to face up to such a tough challenge because, let's be honest, there's nothing that's happened in the past eight years that will need an apology from anyone!

Older parishioners will remember that much-loved old hymn 'Who's Sorry Now?'.

Well, *I* am! I don't mind telling you how much better I feel when I've apologised for someone else's mistakes!

In fact, I've written an updated version of that old chorus, which we're all going to sing at this week's Sunday evening service:

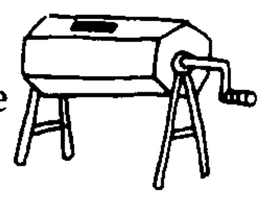
"We're sorry, we're sorry,
We're really, really sorry.
That's why we all don't mind saying
That we're all sorry now!"

Words and music T. Blair.

Tony

Tombola News

Mrs Jowell writes:



A number of parishioners have asked me why we are no longer giving any money from the proceeds of the weekly tombola to such causes as the Samaritans. This is because in a forward-looking parish such as St Albion's we have to consider the needs of people who are seriously disadvantaged, rather than just suicidal.

That is why the bulk of our funds this year will go to the St Albion's Ethnic and Disabled Sex Workers Collective, who have submitted imaginative plans for a wheelchair-accessible brothel on the High Street, next to the public library. T.J.

A Personal Triumph

I am sure everyone in the parish would like to join me in congratulating the courageous individual whose astonishing achievements have recently been making headlines all round the world. Battling against all manner of storms, defying the most fearful odds, this lone fighter has confounded the critics and sailed safely into harbour, as I always said I would! T.B.

☺ *Welcome Back* ☹

We are very pleased to have Mr Campbell back in the parish team on a full-time basis, as our Communications Outreach Coordinator.

As you may remember, Mr Campbell had a bit of a "breakdown" last summer, and I told him that he could take some time off. I said to him, "Alastair, take as long as you like, and you can come back just as soon as you're feeling better."

Unfortunately he has not responded to his medication, which means that he is still suffering from what the doctors apparently call "Tourette's Syndrome". This is a very sad medical condition, which means that the patient, through no fault of his own, suddenly gives vent to a continual stream of obscenities. Naturally, this might cause offence to some older people. But it's important that no one takes this personally. If he comes up to you in the street and calls you a "f***ing t**t" he doesn't mean it. In fact, he doesn't even know he's saying it. It's just Alastair's way of being friendly!

That's why we've given him his job back, so that he can work through some of his problems and focus his undoubted talents on working for the good of the parish.

So, if you get an email in the middle of the night calling you something unpleasant and saying that your head is going to be kicked in, I hope you will have the good sense to forget about it! Let us all try to remember that Mr Campbell is a very sick man, with all kinds of personality disorders, and it behoves us all to treat him with compassion!

And I don't mind admitting that sometimes, in spite of his illness, Mr Campbell does sometimes get it spot on when he gives somebody an earful! So I personally am very grateful to him for agreeing to come back to the Vicarage to help me out in the relaunch of the "good ship St Albion" as it sets out on its third epic voyage! Alastair has made a great start by going out at night with his spray-can and writing "Mr Howard Is A Pig" on the bus-shelter! T.B.

Scenes from Parish Life

"The welcoming back of the unrepentant sinner!" As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

A warning from Mr Mandelson, our former churchwarden, who is now heading up our Oecumenical Outreach programme in Brussels

As you may remember, I know where you all live! In particular, I know where Mr Humphrys, the presenter of BBC Radio Albion's Good Morning Albion! show, lives! Mr Humphrys has been persistently negative in his attitude towards our European Outreach project. And, not only that, he has been extremely disrespectful towards the Vicar, not to menion my new good friend Mr Campbell. Mr Humphrys is of course perfectly entitled to say whatever he likes. But, should he turn up one morning and find the whole building has burned to the ground, he should realise that he has only himself to blame!

He should remember my famous motto – *"I'm a lighter, not a quitter!"*

P. Mandelson,
612 Rue des Matelots, Bruxelles.

✂ Cut-out-'n'-Keep

The Vicar's Six Pledges

1. **Happiness for all**
2. **A nice home for everyone**
3. **Tidy streets**
4. **Lovely hospitals**
5. **Bright and cheerful classrooms**
6. **Sunny weather**

LONE BRITISH ADVENTURESS SAILS IN TO BREAK RECORD

by Our Men In Australia **Sidney Harbour and Mel Bourne**

NO CROWDS at all lined the waterfront here in Sydney as a flotilla of little boats didn't accompany the lone British authoress as she arrived after an epic journey that has taken her halfway around the world.

"It's great to be here in New Zealand," said a tired but triumphant Cherie Blair. "But now I've completed my historic voyage all I want to do is to put people to sleep for several hours."

Cheriety

A delighted Cherie was driven from the quayside by Rolls Royce to attend her first public engagement following her record-breaking feat – giving a talk to the Didgeridoo Rotary Club on "How I Chose The Colours For The Upstairs En-Suite Guest Bathroom at Number 10".

A huge crowd of six people, all of whom had paid £10,000 for a seat, listened intently as Mrs Blair shattered the record for the most boring speech ever given for charity by a Prime Minister's wife.

When it was over, they paid tribute to the gallant lone Briton for the sheer guts and determination she had shown in travelling thousands of miles to raise money for her favourite charity, the Connaught Square Retirement Home in London.

The High Sleaze

Said 87-year-old Mrs Moonie Ponds of Bazza's Rock, "It was a historic moment which I was proud to be part of. We love the Queen and she was looking absolutely regal."

That Dame Cherie Record-Breaking Speech in full

"It's lovely to be here, wherever it is. Marriage is a partnership between two people. I always think that it is very important for politicians not to exploit their children. Here are some pictures of mine. 10 Downing Street is a historic building in which many famous prime ministers have lived. If you would like to know more, you can buy my book Life Inside Number 10 Through The Ages by Mrs Bragg. If you would like a signed copy, this will be only 100 dollars extra, and for 750 dollars I will also write in your personal name, as long as it is not too long. It's been a real pleasure talking to you, whoever you are."

THE WORLD'S WORST COLUMNIST

Why We Need Heroes

By Max Hastings

WE British have always admired the risk-takers, the adventurers, those who stand out from the dull, sheep-like conformity of the ordinary masses.

That is why, at this historic moment in our island story, we can rightly take pride in heroes like myself, who are not afraid to stand waist-deep for many hours, battling to the death with Johnny trout. *(Will this do? You rang me a bit late after lunch. M.H.)*

"Good morning. I'm Mr Stinchcombes' solicitor"

World of Soccer

'WE CAN STILL DO IT' Knee's Shock Pledge

by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In The Star Of India Balti House Watching The Match On His Nokia 3GMPH

THE SOCCER world was rocked to its foundations yesterday when tight-lipped Neasden supremo Ron Knee, 59, told pressmen, "Yes, we can still do it."

The ashen-faced mastermind of the points-starved North Circular club Neasden United said: "The Squirrels are still in there with a fighting chance. Do not write us off yet. The top boys have only got to start slipping up for our lads to climb the mountain which is theirs for the taking."

Ron Knee is 59.

Late Score

Dollis Hill 17
(Furtwangler 6, Ukulele 4, Velasquez 3, Mitterrand 4)

Neasden 0

(Match abandoned due to racial abuse)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Arthur Miller

So. Farewell
Then Arthur
Miller, famous
Playwright.

You were
Once married
To Marilyn
Monroe.

I have never
Seen any of your
Plays.

But I did
See *Gentlemen*
Prefer Blondes.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

He was also celebrated for a bizarre juggling act performed in the dark and with nothing visible apart from his genitals, daubed with fluorescent paint. Fans would greet his arrival on stage with cries of "Get yer knob out". He was said to be huge in Germany and Sweden.

Malcolm Hardee Obituary, Daily Telegraph

Asylum seekers
Refuge and strength

Times Education Supplement, Scotland

THOSE ALL-TIME GREAT ALASTAIR CAMPBELL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

SINCE the revelation that Alastair Campbell came up with the now legendary Pigs and Shylock posters for the Labour Party, it has emerged that the former Downing Street Communications Director was also responsible for some of the other all-time classic advertising campaigns, including:

Mr Kipling makes f**ng good cakes** *(Mr Kipling)*

Vorsprung Furch Technik *(Audi)*

Beanz Meanz C*ntz! *(Heinz)*

Hello Twats! *(Wonderbra)*

Guinness is good for you, you f*ing twat** *(Guinness)*

You ct with a Nissan** *(Nissan)*

Go f* yourself on an egg** *(The Egg Marketing Board)*

Alastair Campbell isn't working *(Labour Party)*

Advertisement

Only to readers of Private Eye

VERY LOVELY

ENGAGEMENT SOUVENIR ASHTRAY

FROM HOUSE OF GNOME

TO CELEBRATE the engagement of HRH Prince Charles and Mrs Parker Bowles, House of Gnome is proud to offer Private Eye readers an exclusive and very beautiful commemorative ashtray that will bring you and your family unlimited pleasure and delight in years to come.

Designed by Royal Ashtray specialist, Sir Geraldo do Scarfini FRPNS, the Royal Ashtray is fashioned from indestructible porcelain-style gnomlon™ and is guaranteed to resist burn stains from all known brands.

Truly an ornament to grace the home of smokers and non-smokers alike, the Gnome Ashtray is also a unique investment opportunity. City analysts have shown that your ashtray can only increase in value and could be worth as much as £47,000 by January 2010.

Do not waste this opportunity to acquire a priceless piece of Royal smoking history.

Send £2.99 (+VAT) to: Royal Ashtray Offer, Unit 94, Trading Estate, Hartley Wintney, Hants.

(Don't Miss Our "Buy One Get Ten Free" Offer. Closes August 4.)

ON BENDED KNEE

SYLVIE KRIN's new Royal Romance

THE spring sunshine streamed through the window of the Neddy Seagoon room at Highgrove, bathing Camilla's hair with an ethereal glow.

Camilla puffed nervously on her full-strength Portsmouth Shag. What was Charles doing, grovelling on all fours at her feet? Had he lost his contact lens again?

"Er... er..." Charles stuttered. "I've got something to ask you, old girl."

Was this it? The moment she had been waiting for all those years? Her mind raced back to those blissful, stolen moments that had spelled out their furtive romance – their marriage in all but name. The moment their eyes met at her wedding reception. The quick kiss in the men's changing room at the Ikea Polo Club. The "first time" at the Ramada Hotel, Milton Keynes. How they had laughed when Charles tried to put his kilt in the trouser press...

And now, at last, here he was, her Prince on bended knee.

"Yes, Charles, yes... what was it?"

"Er... Could you help me up?" he whispered. "That damn arthritis has got the other knee now."

Outside, the ancient oaks of Highrove groaned in the freezing February wind.

Read more in forthcoming issues...

The Royal Engagement

by Constitutional Historian **SIR QUENTIN BORE**
(Editor, Monarchy Today)

THE engagement of Prince Charles and Mrs Parker Bowles has thrown up a number of fascinating constitutional issues involving not only the Crown but also the Church of which Charles will one day be titular head.

No Royal Consort since Queen Agatha of Wheems (1538-1749) has ever been designated *(cont'd p. 94)*

Advertisement

Ikea Appeal

Thousands of people lost everything in the terrible Ikea disaster at Edmonton North last week.

In a matter of minutes a huge wave of greedy people swept through Ikea grabbing sofas and clinging desperately to self-assembly shelving systems.

Now you can help them rebuild their lives and their sofas by sending a donation to the Gnome Ikea Appeal.

Name _

Address _

✔ £5 will buy a desk lamp
✔ £10 a bedside cabinet
✔ £20 a CD and DVD tower

Gnome Ikea Appeal

Exclusive to the Labour Government

An Apology

IN RECENT weeks and months we may have given the impression that Britain's asylum system was finally running smoothly, that the number of successful applicants had plummeted, and that over the past six years the Government had managed to come to grips with this most difficult of issues and solved the problem by bringing in stringent new checks which had reduced the number of asylum seekers arriving in Britain to a mere trickle.

We now realise, in the light of the Conservatives capturing the headlines last week with their immigration policy, that nothing could be further from the truth, and that Britain is facing an immigration crisis, a crisis that can only be solved by this Government bringing in stringent new checks designed to curb the number of asylum seekers flooding into Britain.

We apologise for any confusion caused and any confusion in the future when, in the run-up to the election, we trumpet figures showing a massive fall in the number of asylum seekers arriving in... etc... etc... etc...

TORIES TO SUE OVER ELECTION SLUR

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

THE ENTIRE Tory Party (Sid and Doris Howard) is to sue the *Times* newspaper for the "outrageous and highly damaging suggestion" that the party might win the forthcoming election.

Solicitors acting for the Conservative Party said last night "it would be hard to imagine a graver and more opprobrious falsehood than to suggest that the Tory party stands any chance whatever of forming the next government. We have made our position transparently clear. Our party is totally committed to defeat, and we are doing everything in our power to ensure that we come in an embarrasing fourth, after UKIP (but slightly ahead of Veritarse).

"To suggest otherwise is little short of scandalum magnatum, and we shall seek appropriate damages of, shall we say, £10 million plus costs."

But the *Times* was last night unrepentant. Said editor Robert Manwithglasses, "We haven't got any evidence, but we are standing by our Tory".

Michael Gove is ill.

Sexual abuse centre looking for volunteers

Esher News & Mail

"I'm sorry, sir, you can't change channels"

KILROY-SILK IN NEW IMMIGRATION ROW

by Our Political Staff **Verity Arse**

THE controversial former television presenter Robert Kilroy-Silk was plunged into fresh controversy last night when he became the focus of accusations of racism.

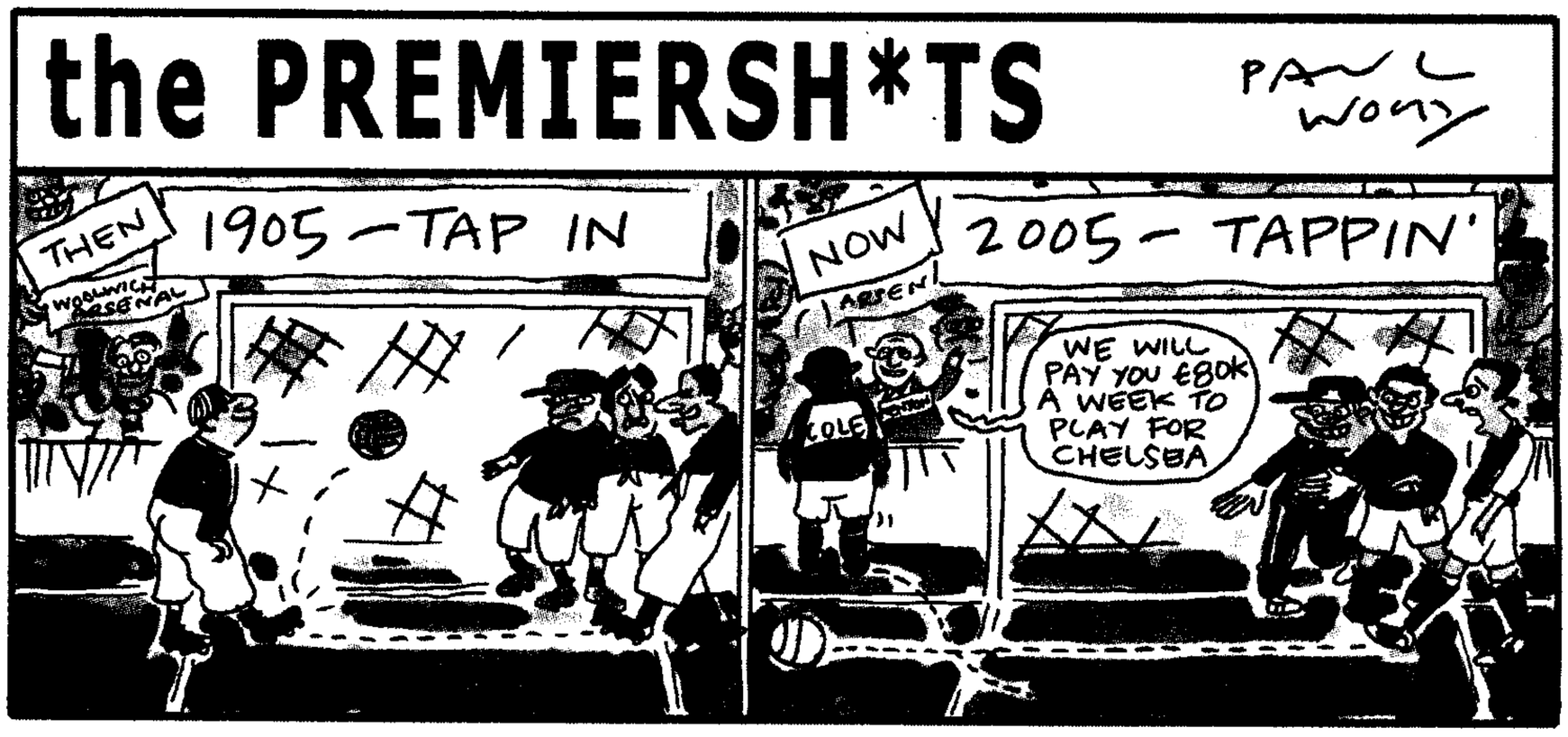
According to eyewitness reports, millions of people in Britain believe that Kilroy-Silk "should not be allowed in Britain" and "should be sent home to Portugal where he belongs."

Said one typical member of the public, "Don't get me wrong. I'm not racist. I just don't like people who are orange."

Mr Kilroy-Silk complained bitterly about his treatment in Britain. "How dare people object to me purely because of the colour of my skin? They should object to me because of my stupid and offensive views."

Late News

■ **Kilroy-Silk wins Orange Prize**



ACTORS WIN AWARDS

THE showbusiness world was stunned by news that some actors had won some awards for something at a glittering ceremony, somewhere.

The actors were reported to be very pleased that they had won the awards for whatever it was and hoped to win some more at some other time. *(Reuters)*

Nursery Times

Friday, 18 February, 2005

FAIRYTALE ENDING AS PRINCE MARRIES UGLY SISTER

by Our Court Staff
Hans Moslem Andersen

BELLS rang out all over fairyland yesterday at the news that Prince Charming is finally to marry his longtime live-in companion, the Ugly Sister.

This brings to an end years of speculation following the tragic death of the Princess Cinderella in a coach accident.

The Ugly Sister will take the title The Duchess of Charming,

but will not become the Queen of Hearts when her husband succeeds to the fairyland throne.

Instead she will be known as the Princess Consort, since she has consorted with the Prince for as long as anyone can remember.

Late News

Auditor to open inquiry into Knave of Hearts 'Organic Tart' business. *Was there jiggery-pokery in the accounts?* **94**

JUMBLIES HONOURED AFTER EPIC VOYAGE

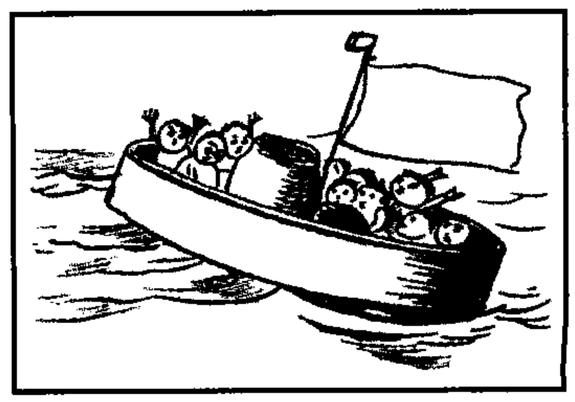
by Christopher Sievester

LAST night, after a record-breaking 20-year voyage which took them to the hills of the Chankly-Bore and various other undiscovered lands, the green-headed and blue-handed Jumblies returned in their famous craft, the B&Q Sieve, to their home port in Jumblyland.

Following their triumphant return, the Jumblies are estimated to be making more than £50 million in sponsorship deals from their unique sieve-adventure, including a seven-figure sum from Sieveco, the Hong Kong-based garden accessory conglomerate.

Jumbly Sale

The Jumblies have been reporting on their journey



exclusively in the Nursery Times, and a number of publishers are said to be vying for the rights to their autobiography 'We Went To Sea'.

Said one Jumbly, "All this money makes it seem worthwhile, after what was frankly a nightmare ordeal. The sky was dark, the voyage was long, and, as for the water, it soon came in. I tell you, my hands would have gone blue with cold if they had not been blue already."

CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS LOOMS

ROYAL experts say they fear that Prince Charles' marriage to the divorcee Camilla Parker Bowles may face difficulties, as it won't be accepted by certain sections of the population because "she isn't as attractive as Diana".

Said one expert, Lady Antonia Holden, "For some people, the fact that Camilla 'isn't as attractive as Diana' is a major constitutional issue that threatens to derail the chance of Charles ever being accepted as King. I think they are quite right and *(cont. p. 94)*

That Digital Switchover Timetable In Full

20.08pm Householder plugs in Freeview box they bought at Dixons.

20.10pm Household sees what sort of rubbish digital TV consists of.

20.12pm Household switches back over to terrestrial TV.

Er... that's it.

"Right, for a day's work, who'll start me off at £500?"

Lesbian model wins sex pest case against boss

George Foxwell, her lawyer, said: "The applicant's case is that it was implied that if she slept with Miss Hough it would be good for her career. This is a classic case of sexual harassment, someone who is looking for an advantage by using their power and tempting the person with a carrot."

Daily Telegraph

"Kevin's set his heart on becoming the new Pope"

BLAIR MAKES HISTORIC APOLOGY

TONY BLAIR today made an historic public apology to the Man In The Iron Mask for his wrongful imprisonment.

"King Louis XIV of France's decision to lock up his brother Philippe in a rotting jail cell was a terrible miscarriage of justice," a clearly emotional Blair told reporters. "One that I am all too happy to apologise for – particularly during an election year."

Mr Blair thanked the Three Musketeers for their tireless efforts to clear Philippe's name, saying that but for their swashbuckling the prisoner's conviction may never have been quashed by the Court of Appeal.

BLAIR DOESN'T MAKE HISTORIC APOLOGY

TONY BLAIR today didn't make an historic public apology to those British men wrongly imprisoned in Guantamo Bay and Belmarsh Prison under anti-terror laws, who were released some years later without charge, never having beeen told what the accusations against them were.

"This was a terrible and shocking miscarriage of justice and for it my Government makes absolutely no apology whatsoever," said the Prime *(cont'd. p. 94)*

"Have you tried to fix this yourself?"

The Daily Telegraph

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING QUALITY PAPER Friday, February 18, 2005

Telegraph To Axe 94 Jobs

By Our Political, Home Affairs, Foreign, Media, Sport, Gardening And Crossword Staff **Phil Paper**

IN A bold move to cut costs at their ailing newspaper titles, the Barclay brothers have announced "a drastic reduction in staff".

The Brothers, speaking from Brilleau, their remote island pad, said, "We cannot reveal the precise figures, but we are looking at future staffing levels of approximately two".

The cuts follow an analysis of the newspaper group's viability by the businessmen brothers who noticed that the only features in the newspaper which made money were the advertisements.

"This is why we decided to have more adverts and fewer articles," said one of the brothers. "This inevitably led to a decision to reduce the number of journalists to none at all," said the other one.

However, editor Phil Paper told himself, "Journalists are the lifeblood of a newspaper. Oh dear, I've been sacked" *(cont. p. 45)*

"At least I'm still in the paper"

Advertisement

DO YOU SUFFER FROM IRRITABLE JOWELL SYNDROME?

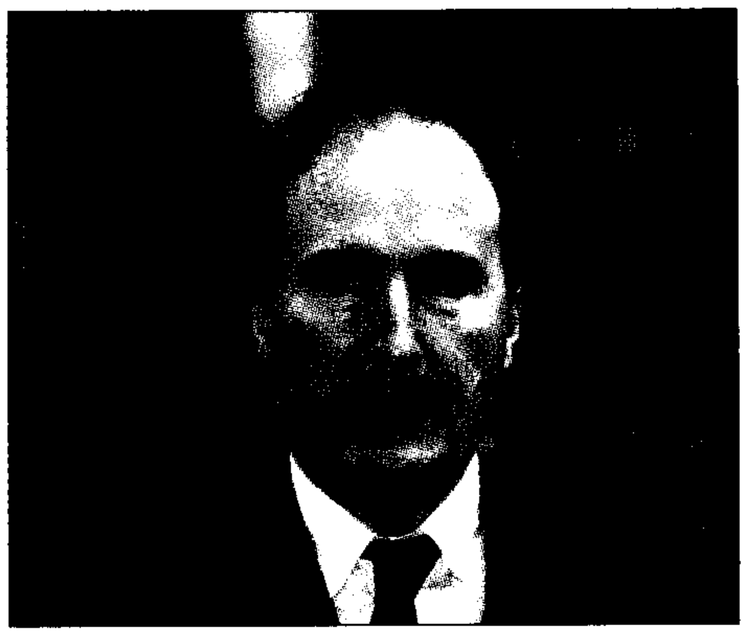
Millions of people experience the trauma of IJS whenever they see Tessa Jowell on television or read about her in the newspapers.

Symptoms include: ● **nausea** ● **heartburn** ● **uncontrollable rage** ● **homicidal urges**.

If you are a victim of IJS, there is no known cure and you just have to learn to live with it.

Issued by the IJS Society of Great Britain

DIARY



CHARLES MOORE

I went toad-hunting last weekend. The most obviously useful of all forms of hunting – no-one likes a toad – it also has a strange beauty about it.

Is there a sound closer to the deep, mystic spirit of the English countryside than the sudden squelch of toad beneath Wellington boot?

We gathered at dawn, each of us wearing boots several sizes too big, for maximum impact. Never has the English countryside looked more peculiarly beautiful. In the distance, the early sun bounced off the warty, dappled backs of a squadron of basking toads. It was as if, in some mysterious way, these toads were beckoning us over, yearning for the firm squash of reinforced boot upon their enticingly rubbery bodies.

My host, the Earl of Crowborough, represents the fifteenth generation of his family to have squashed toads in their corner of East Sussex. Toad-squashing is close to the heart of an aristocratic approach to life because it is communal, ceremonial, democratic (in the true meaning of the word – "demo" meaning "toad" and "cratic" meaning "let's stamp on a") and makes a beautiful sound – like an explosion from a Whoopee cushion, but less vulgar.

Spadefoot toads feed on mosquitoes, so as we approached them, Johnny Crowborough instructed us to make high-pitched buzzing noises, and flap our arms around. Then we moved in for the kill, putting on our bowler hats and rushing at the toads with great, purposeful strides. I had a toad cornered, and he knew it. Is it too fanciful to suggest that, in the split-second before the firm smack of my heel met the groaning bulk of his body, a look of gratitude shone from his toady eyes? And I think he smiled. Nothing but a humble toad, he was able to relish the privilege of being permitted to partake in this great tradition. This is something New Labour would never be able to understand. Today, the fox-hunt. Tomorrow, the toad-hunt. Who knows what will be banned next week?

This week I was talking to a local GP. He is hard-working and decent, and everything else the Labour legislators dislike. He told me that Labour is developing secret plans to further curtail the freedom of doctors. If Labour wins the next election, Blair plans to "crack down" (to employ the fashionable jargon) on doctors – however skilled or diligent they may be – who wish to do away with their patients.

For centuries, tradition let doctors knock off the odd patient. There will, of course, always be the odd bad apple who takes it too far. Dr Shipman certainly deserved some sort of dressing-down, even if the actual punishment measured out to him by Labour was typically draconian and humourless. But if all doctors are to be denied the right to put down any patient who irritates or provokes them, the number of bright youngsters wishing to sign up for medical school will plummet accordingly. Is this really what Blair wants? On second thoughts, I suspect it is. From Labour's point of view, too many doctors support fox-hunting, so the sooner the entire profession is abolished, the better.

The liquid runs out of our "Fairy Liquid" just as we are about to embark on the washing-up. I have noticed the strange fact that this occurs with disarming regularity. Is this a fluke, or is it part of an unspoken policy by Labour? And why should Blair and his busy-body cohorts so hate to see dishes clean?

Could it be because they wish to spread MRSA? At the moment it is confined to hospitals, but if they can spread it beyond, to dish-washing, Conservative-voting households, the General Election will be theirs for the asking.

In the evening, Johnny Crowborough led us into his delightful neo-classical barn for the Toad Dinner. A piper gave us a fine rendering of "Nearer My God To Thee" on the Natterjacks, a more plangent version of the Bagpipes, sewn from the matured bellies of twenty natterjack toads.

The main course consisted of a magnificent toad stew, cooked from the morning's bag. When we had finished our feasting, we were led by Vince, the friendly lower-class Head Toadier, down a long corridor to a centuries-old marble basin. At a given signal from Vince, we proceeded to "vomit up" the entire feast in the traditional manner.

As the evening sun shone through the fine neo-Gothic tracery, spreading its warm dappled rays o'er the lively yellows, greens and browns of the gloriously regurgitated toads, I couldn't help but feel that this was one part of England that Blair must wish to see abolished forever, along with fresh air, the Royal Family, and white people.

BBC announcers insist on using the expression, "This is the news". One hears it every night, without fail. Yet news is plural. They should say, "These are the news" and, half an hour later, "Those were the news". They never will, of course, because the BBC is a socialist institution, within which correct English is regarded as the enemy of the state. Have we ever had a more horrid public culture?

Some annoying things encountered too often at present: bicyclists who insist on pedalling slowly uphill and then sue the poor drivers who attempt to run them over; guilty people who won't admit they are rightfully imprisoned; politicians who puff themselves up by declaring that there is something intrinsically "wrong" about poor people starving but who never stop to worry about wealthy people who are inflicted with indigestion quite as often; discrimination in our so-called "public" services against those educated at public school (when was the last time you bumped into a railway ticket-collector with a public school education?); men and women who work in the city but who nevertheless modishly refuse to wear bowler hats and wing collars; bus-drivers who refuse to go just a little out of their way to deliver you to your front door, preferring to suit themselves by dropping you at a Maoist "bus stop"; characters in soap operas who forget to say "good morning" or "good afternoon" before addressing one another; Gordon Brown's churlish refusal to wear a kilt and sporran whilst simultaneously affecting a Scottish accent; the conspiracy by BBC Radio to limit the airtime given to Lord Rockingham's X1. Where will it end?

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

LOOK AT THIS RIDICULOUS LETTER FROM MY BANK ABOUT THE USE OF MY CASHCARD...
IT'S A COMPLETE AND UTTER OUTRAGE! I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOT INTO THEM...
HOW DARE THEY TRY AND DICTATE TO ME, OF ALL PEOPLE, HOW I MANAGE MY MONEY?! YOU READ IT JOHNSON.
"NEVER DIVULGE YOUR PIN NUMBER TO ANYONE."
DO THEY REALLY BELIEVE CELEBRITIES LIKE ME GO TO THE CASHPOINT OURSELVES?

Literary Review

Who's Roget-ing who?

Villages
John Updike
(Hamish Hamilton, £17.99)

BACK in the days when his father, Sir Kingsley Amis, was still noisily at large on the planet, Martin Amis once addressed the question of what it was his father disliked about certain aspects of his son's writing. The problem, Amis *fils* readily conceded, was that he – Martin – wanted each sentence to crackle with luxuriant linguistic fireworks, while Dad pined for sober and low-key formulations along the lines of "They finished their drinks and left."

And into which of these contrasting literary categories does that spry septuagenarian Mr John Updike fall? It takes no more than a glance at the opening chapter of *Villages*, in which that spry septuagenarian Owen Mackenzie lies in bed of a morning while the real world, "a tiger unwounded by his dream", awaits beyond, to establish that our man is a luxuriant linguistic fireworks kind of a chap.

It was ever thus. Updike's novels, of which this is the 21st thrumming example, generally display two main signature marks. On the one hand they proffer grandiloquent sexual autobiographies, in which the subject's emotional life is adroitly lashed to the freight train of history. On the other they advertise a sort of gargantuan wrestling match with language, in which the object being described tries vainly to drag itself up from the mat while Mr U lambasts it with yet more Roget-rough-aged adjectival forearm smashes.

And the chief beneficiary of this fraught linguistic dalliance? Sex, my dears. At 72, or whatever he is now, Updike's obsession with the sexual act, and in particular the bits of one that engage in the sexual act, is frankly risible. Owen's phallic odyssey – he's a regular kind of guy, computer buff, quarter-century into his second marriage – begins back in high school with a chick called Elsie whose breasts sport "dear little nipples like rabbit noses". At MIT he meets his first wife, cool Phyllis, the individual strands of whose mussed hair "tickled his face with the exasperating persistent delicacy of flies' feet on a muggy day" (that's right – *exasperating persistent delicacy*), before embarking on the first step of his career as a serial adulterer with lickerish Faye ("the grip of her vagina had something infantile about it, something heartbreaking, like a child's shy, hopeful question.")

Faye gives way to Alissa and Stacie, and to Jacqueline with her finely developed leg muscles – the extraordinary beetle-browed seriousness with which Mr U describes "the flat tendony knit behind her knee" – and thence to, among many others, Vanessa, who teaches him the invaluable lesson that "masculine women give great sex". Apparently they "pounce on orgasms like a hawk on a baby quail". Good old Vanessa! Why, "in a graceful, short-nailed hand she would hold his erection as if it were the stem of an oversize wineglass." And then, of course, there are "those livid wrinkles, looking like lava folds" over which bug-eyed Owen lasciviously drools.

All this comes garnished with some quite startlingly tedious reminiscences of Owen's early life in out-of-town Pennsylvania and subsequent professional career in Massachusetts, horribly weighed down by the usual clamorous overwriting. A stray reference to his VW Beetle can't be allowed to pass without the customary riffs about "that fabled, notoriously unsafe 'sixties vehicle of countercultural rebellion and conspicuous thrift", while a promising conceit about only being able to conceptualise male neighbours by way of their golf swings grinds on endlessly about Geoffrey Dillingham's "exaggerated shoulder-stance" and Quentin Chute's "trigger-quick hand-punch".

Let us not delude ourselves, as Ian McEwan does on the cover ("The finest novelist writing in English today") and Blake Morrison did in a whole page of a recent *Guardian Saturday Review*. This is the most awful rubbish, in which no object, no human activity or thought process is reliably described and everything is subservient to the look-at-me-lads elfin prose style. Notwithstanding a devious final twist (what happened to Phyllis) and a stark glimpse or so into the deepening old person's twilight, no sensitive reader will be able to read a phrase like "These hair-adorned nether parts closely fitted into the sites of urination and defecation, were seats of being, ugly and odorous in external contemplation but in sensation exquisite" without giggling. Me? I finished my drink and left.

Books & Bookmen

■ "LEADERSHIP books – there are just too many of them. The already swamped self-help bookshelves groan in irritation at their sheer numbers," quips Crapita boss Rod Aldridge in a book review for *Management Today* magazine.

True as this may be, it's an odd stance for a man whose company, in its "Capita: Learning and Development" guise, flogs more than 120 titles on "management and leadership", with titles such as *The Effective Supervisor* and *Managing the Mavericks*.

In fact Capita paid £24m to acquire a whole slew of leadership-related titles along with the Industrial Society's workforce training business. So if anyone could lighten the groaning shelves, it's Aldridge.

■ ANTHONY Forbes-Watson, chief executive of Penguin UK, is out on his ear after eight years following "genuine differences of view on the way forward for the Penguin and DK businesses".

The obvious conclusion is that Dame Marjorie Scardino has demanded, and got, a head on a stick for the Rugby warehouse balls-up. This is underlined by the fact that Forbes-Watson will be replaced by John Makinson, Forbes-Watson's immediate boss, who was, during his years as Pearson's finance director, Scardino's favoured henchman at corporate HQ.

However, as chairman and chief executive of the Penguin Group globally since 2002, should Makinson himself not bear some responsibility for what happened at Rugby? Of course; but he's secure in his job because he has Scardino's ear in a way that Forbes-Watson never did.

There are heavy hints that Marge has had it in for AFW for quite some time, and that this was merely the chance she was waiting for to impose direct control from corporate HQ without having to deal with troublesome publishers.

■ THE new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* has stirred up controversy in the pages of the *TLS*.

First, Nikolai Tolstoy wrote to complain that the entry on his stepfather, the novelist Patrick O'Brian, was riddled with errors, largely due to O'Brian's curious autobiographical revisionism. He admitted that he had been contacted to supply accurate information on O'Brian, but had declined because he was writing his stepfather's biography.

Dictionary editor Lawrence Goldman replied to excoriate Tolstoy for his lack of generosity and suggest that the errors were thus his fault. Rather than quitting while he was ahead, though, Goldman went on to suggest that "a work of such scope and depth written by many different hands" could never be free from errors.

This has drawn a response from one contributor, Arthur Freeman, who suggests there are too many errors (out of 150 articles he consulted for another project, 40 of them contained "howlers... ie, mistakes that would corrupt or vitiate any secondary work based upon them"), and that Goldman's management methods are responsible for many of the inaccuracies.

How so?w Freeman points to "the editorial decision to refuse to put contributors in touch with each other" which has resulted in a number of "flatly contradictory articles" and wild variations in the spelling of certain names.

When Macmillan launched the new *Grove Dictionary of Music* (since acquired by OUP, publishers of the *ODNB*) largely unedited, the answer was to let readers pick up on the errors and inform the publisher. Freeman, however, thinks this approach stinks. "OUP will be charging for such services, and presumably thus profiting from them, so that if *ODNB* expects readers to flock to it with corrective suggestions, should they not offer to pay for those they accept?"

'Bookworm'

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
DAY 13 .... CONSTANT STRESS.... NO SLEEP.... I'M NEVER GOING TO MAKE IT...
B&Q
JUST STOP WHINGEING AND FINISH THE BOOK!
SOB!
ELLEN MACARTHUR - MY STORY
HOIST THOSE SALES!

Big Ish. Who?

Never Let Me Go
Kazuo Ishiguro
(Faber, £16.99)

THE reviews of Ian McEwan's new book *Saturday* must have been tough for his mates in the Granta Best of British class of '83. Shy, bespectacled Macabre seemed the quietest in the room at the time; but now he's "the outstanding writer of his generation".

And where are that generation now? Mart flew off to Uraguay after the reviews of his last one and hasn't been seen since, while Salman is mainly famous these days for staying alive and changing wives. And then there's Ish.

The second of the gang to win the Booker Prize after Salman – with *The Remains of the Day* in 1989 – he looked set for the rare double of literary credibility and punter love. His Booker winner – rightly admired for its presentation of a desiccated English upper-class mentality – soon became a movie. Tony Hopkins and Emma T played the doomed love affair of a butler and a maid in the employ of a Nazi-sympathising lord with such Chekhovian intensity that a stream of tears flowed down the Odeon floor.

But, since then, while Ian Macabre has become the one to move the sales and sell to the movies, Ishiguro's nickname has seemed increasingly appropriate because all his recent books have been a bit, well, Ish. *The Unconsoled* was a vast exercise in close description, detailing over hundreds of pages the preparations of a concert pianist for a performance.

Whereas critical references to the writer's Japanese birthplace had previously been complimentary – delicate, inscrutable, rice-paper, screen-print – one reviewer now invoked a darker oriental stereotype: suggesting that Ishiguro, for delivering this after *The Remains of the Day*, should commit hari-kiri.

The odd admirer of *The Unconsoled* praised it as a Thomas Mann pastiche and it certainly seems that Ish's post-Booker books are working through the different literary genres, though in a characteristically oblique way. His last novel – *When We Were Orphans* – involved a colonial child, in Shanghai in the 1930s, who uses his knowledge of classic detective fiction to try to solve a family mystery.

In the game of literary *Stars In Their Eyes*, this was a writer saying: tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be Ngaio Marsh. But, Ish being Ish, he couldn't just write a detective novel. It was necessary, as the blurb promised, to "transcend" the genre. This meant a crime novel in which the crime was never solved.

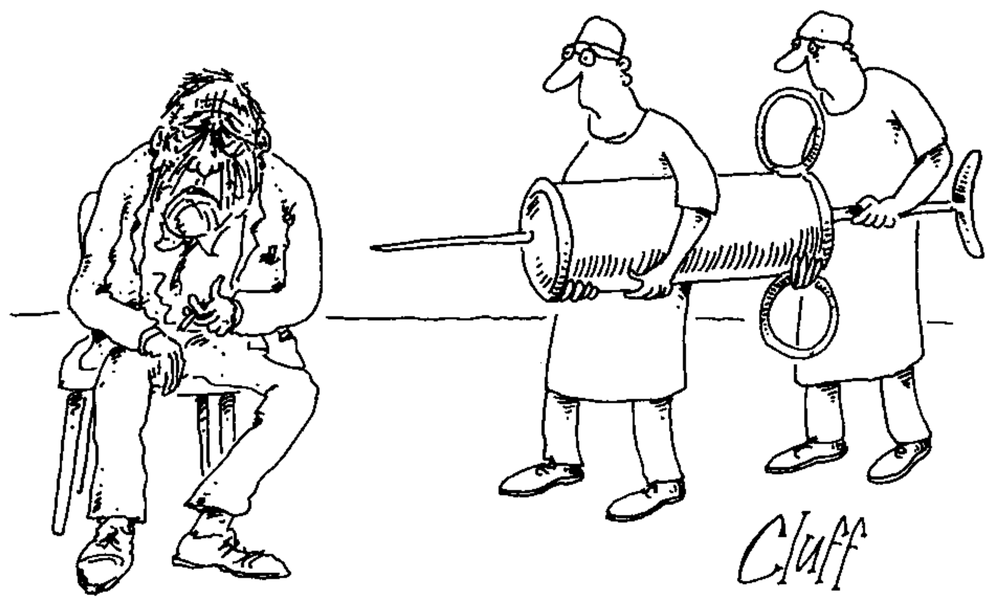
Never Let Me Go finds Ish attempting to transcend another genre: tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be Arthur C. Clarke. The novel follows three former students at Hailsham, a school in the English countryside. At first, you think this is just another record of posh repression; but you soon pick up that the lingo at this establishment is strange even by the standards of English preppers. The students are known as "donors" until they go off to become "carers". And their biology lessons contain some stuff that isn't on the national curriculum.

Suspense fiction (which, of a very mild kind, this is) requires reviewers to put a lock on the plot; but anyone who has read a bit of Steve Jones or watched a few Robert Winston programmes will soon work out that the donations are not to the Tsunami appeal.

But the problem with the book isn't Ish's science, it's his English. His last four novels have nominally been told by a quartet of quite different I-narrators – an ageing butler, a middle-aged pianist, a teenage boy or, now, an adolescent girl – but they all have exactly the same voice: mannered, desiccated, repressed, metronomic.

Whole paragraphs from this book could be transplanted without difficulty into any of Ish's other books: "The first few times I saw her after the conversation under the eaves, I was ready for at least a bit of huffiness but, no, she was completely civil, if a little flat."

Well, he (or, in the context of the novel, supposedly she) said it: completely civil, if a little flat. Dedicated to delicacy, committed to hinting rather than telling, the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro are stifled by politeness. You might think it's impossible for a novelist to have too much taste. But, in order to hold on to a reader, a writer needs sometimes to let go. Ish has so much taste his books increasingly lack flavour.



Botox Challenge No. 94 – W.H. Auden

LIBRARY NEWS

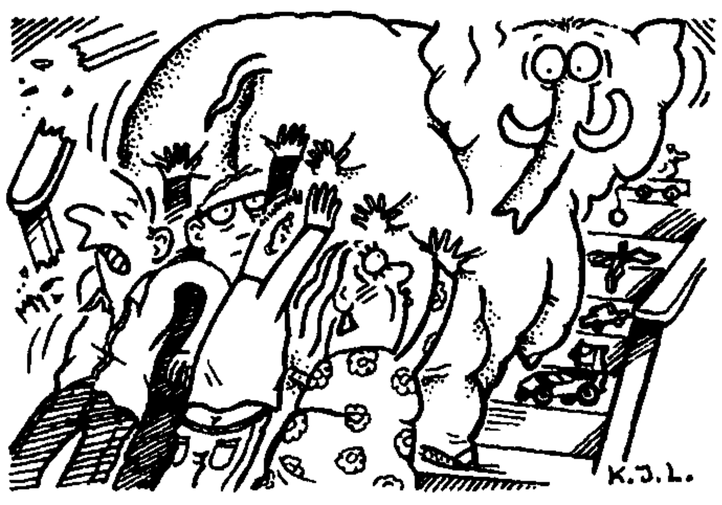
■ BIRMINGHAM's central library has had to stop buying new books, DVDs and videos and staff have been asked for ideas to save £650,000 as the service tries to balance its accounts.

The city has pledged not to cut opening hours or close libraries, leaving library staff fearing for their jobs. But none of this has yet put the nail in the coffin of the grandiose plan for a new out-of-centre public library, the centrepiece of the city's Eastside Learning Quarter.

The estimated cost of the new library had reached a dizzy £300m by last year (rising from £100m when it was first mooted in 2002). Late last year the council was considering ditching it and instead moving the Central Library from its structurally troubled home to the grade II listed Baskerville House in the city centre (*Eye* 1115). But a letter from culture secretary Tessa Jowell chided city bosses that she would be "disappointed" if the Eastside library, designed by Lord Rogers, wasn't built.

I have no quarrel with Einstein
SIMON JENKINS
The Times

Sideways is beautifully written, terrifically acted; it is paced and constructed with such understated mastery that it is a sort of miracle...Audiences at the screenings where I have been present may have heard something like a fusillade of gunshots from the auditorium; it was the sound of my heart breaking into a thousand pieces.
PETER BRADSHAW
Guardian



Some nights it's like pushing an elephant upstairs, but then suddenly that elephant starts to run and it's that fleeting moment that amazes me... it's like a zen experience. You see so many acts who don't even get the elephant to the fuckin' stairs. I think that's why The Who is still valuable.
ROGER DALTREY
Guardian

Pseuds Corner

These South African wines embody the spirit of reconciliation.
ROGER SCRUTON
New Statesman

I find yoga, especially Pranayama yoga, to be of great general benefit to well-being. Water is vital – old age seems to be a wrinkling-up, drying-up process, and the more liquid you intake and absorb, the longer you can keep looking young. The quality of the water and its surface tension makes a great difference to the body's ability to absorb it, so all the water at my house and studio is triple-filtered and goes through a reverse-osmosis process before passing through a pipe which is wrapped in a copper spiral which itself contains imploded water. I am also really into urine therapy, drinking urine and applying it to my skin irritation. And although I fall in and out of practice, seminal retention is good for restoring energy and making me strong.
HARDY BLECHMAN
Independent on Sunday.

Pseuds Educational

I want to give pupils responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning. I want parents, many of whom are disengaged, to become pro-active partners in the process.
DR PATRICK HAZELWOOD, head teacher St John's School, Marlborough
Daily Telegraph

Pseuds Corporate

Hackney Parking Services are on a journey, one that recognises that a parking strategy driven by a commitment to the highest standards of customer care is the only effective way of delivering real benefits to the people, businesses and road users of Hackney. It's about backing respected parking enforcement policies with a customer service ethos.
Hackney Council website

As Head of Transactional Services you will:
- Lead the community of transactional services and deliverers within government and in its strategic partners and suppliers.
- create the frameworks, standards, best practice, metrics and common solutions to underpin the rapid and consistent delivery of improved services...
Cabinet Office job advertisement
Sunday Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Anon, Keiron Pim, Graham Pugh, Joanna Burnett, Dev Bhojwani, David Hasdell, Greg Muttitt, APR.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE DEATH OF CHRISTIAN BLEWITT

Meadowing the waters

THE shadow of discredited paediatrician Prof Sir Roy Meadow hangs over last month's conviction of a West Midlands couple for killing their three-year-old foster child by forcibly administering a large amount of salt as a punishment.

Meadow is the child abuse "expert" whose flawed evidence helped convict innocent mothers Angela Cannings, Sally Clark and Trupti Patel of killing their babies. A key plank of his now highly questionable diagnosis of "Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy" – the theory that some mothers deliberately harm their children to get attention for themselves – was his "finding" that some mothers had deliberately overdosed their infants with salt.

Though Meadow was not called to give evidence at the trial of Ian and Angela Gay (pictured right), his published work on a handful of alleged cases of salt poisoning provided a yardstick for the experts who did.

And as the Gays were about to start five-year jail terms for apparently deciding together to use salt as a punishment for three-year-old Christian Blewitt, another couple whose child was taken into care because of alleged salt poisoning are trying to reopen their case.

Medical and scientific knowledge of sodium chloride poisoning in children is extremely limited and largely dependent on Meadow. Most cases are triggered naturally by dehydration.

However, other aspects of the prosecution case were equally disquieting. Not least that Christian was found to have suffered two episodes of heart damage, the larger one certainly before he was in the care of the Gays. Although pathologists described it as "unique" and not seen before in a child of his age, the implications of this were not explored by the court. Nor was the fact that in a series of admissions to hospital before Christian lived with the Gays, he had also been diagnosed as suffering from hydrocephalus, a potentially fatal leaking of cerebral spinal fluid in the brain.

News reports of the couple's conviction gave the impression that the Gays were transformed from a loving middle-class couple desperate for a family into monstrous child abusers just five weeks after Christian and his two younger siblings arrived at their home in November 2002.

The court heard that Mr Gay rushed Christian to hospital after he collapsed at their home. He died four days later after suffering brain damage and a heart attack.

The initial suggestion was that after Christian refused to eat his lunch and had thrown it to the floor, the Gays lost their tempers and decided to punish him by giving him salt. It was also suggested that they shook or hit him violently, causing brain damage.

However, it emerged at the trial that Christian's bruising was too fresh and must have occurred while he was in hospital, so the shaking/hitting allegation collapsed, leaving the suggestion that Christian's fatal brain haemorrhaging was caused by high levels of sodium chloride.

Once it was accepted that the brain damage had *not* resulted from a blow, the Gays were acquitted of murder. This left the vexed question of manslaughter by non-accidental salt poisoning.

Non-accidental salt-poisoning was first posited by Meadow as long ago as 1977, based on one highly controversial case in which he himself admitted administering high levels of salt to the child in question. In a paper published in 1993, he developed his theory recounting a dozen alleged cases either referred directly or reported to him.

When Christian was admitted to hospital he had a blood level of 184 mmols of sodium chloride – well above a normal dose of up to 145 but not necessarily fatal. Experts disagreed about how much salt the couple would have had to administer to Christian to raise his blood levels so high – anything between 10 and 40 grams, or up to four teaspoons. There was no evidence about how they could have administered it given that a three year old would not consume so much salt voluntarily and there was no sign on their having exerted force.

Probably the most troubling aspect of the case, which points to Christian having died from natural causes, is that high levels of salt were not being excreted by his kidneys as might have been expected. The body sheds excess salt via urine and sweat; yet Christian's kidneys appeared healthy. This discrepancy even falls short of Meadow's own criteria for looking for salt poisoning. He has suggested that as well as high sodium chloride blood levels, there must be high levels passed through urine. Even after doctors inserted a saline drip into Christian, the amount of sodium chloride in his urine remained low.

One expert told the court that it was possible Christian might have been suffering from a new disease and said the cause of his condition may never be known. Tests on vomit Christian had left on Ian Gay's jacket when they arrived at the hospital also showed no sign of salt.

It appears that the prosecution recognised the weaknesses in its case. Throughout, it offered the Gays a plea bargain: it would drop the charges against one if the other confessed to either causing a blow or giving salt.

Both foster parents have lodged appeals on the immediate ground that there is no evidence of how they were supposed to have administered the salt, nor of their "joint enterprise". They are also trying to find new medical evidence that might help them.

Barristers representing the couple told the court the Gays were being convicted of little more than a theory, that several medical questions remained unanswered and that Christian's condition had "taken experts to the limits of medical knowledge". As everyone knows, Prof Meadow, now being investigated by the General Medical Council, has been at the wrong end of those limits before.

CJD COMPENSATION

Nice work

WHAT is happening to £67.5m the government put into a fund to compensate families who saw their loved ones succumb to variant Creutzfeld Jakob Disease (vCJD)?

"New" Labour set up the fund in 2001 with the then health secretary Alan Milburn saying: "The families have been through hell and back and we want to make sure we get it right for them."

So far vCJD has claimed 146 lives in Britain; and the job of administering payments to relatives has been entrusted to the big city law firm, Charles Russell. Funnily enough, the largest single payment, of £1m-plus, that Charles Russell makes out of trust funds each year is to, er, Charles Russell.

Meanwhile, parents and carers who nursed the dying have been struggling to claim the grand sum of £3.91 an hour for providing care. By contrast, the senior partner at Charles Russell, Richard Vallance, bills the trust for his work at nearly £300 an hour. And as families claim 21p per mile for taking the sick and dying to hospital and hospices, they claim those attending trust meetings can claim more than twice that amount.

Last May, when the BBC's *Newsnight* raised questions about delay and administrative costs, Annie McVey, a nurse and mother to 15-year-old Claire who died in January 2000, told the programme: "I don't see how you can justify the huge hourly rates that must be being paid when you are denying families £3.91 an hour."

At the time Vallance declined to be interviewed on *Newsnight* saying the allegations would be "difficult to refute under hostile questioning". Instead the law firm issued a statement. But it was so outraged that anyone might suggest that it was benefiting handsomely from the trust that it complained to Ofcom about *Newsnight*. Who is paying the £20,000 bill to launch the complaint? Certainly not Charles Russell, about whom the programme was complaining. Vallance and his valiant firm are billing the trust!

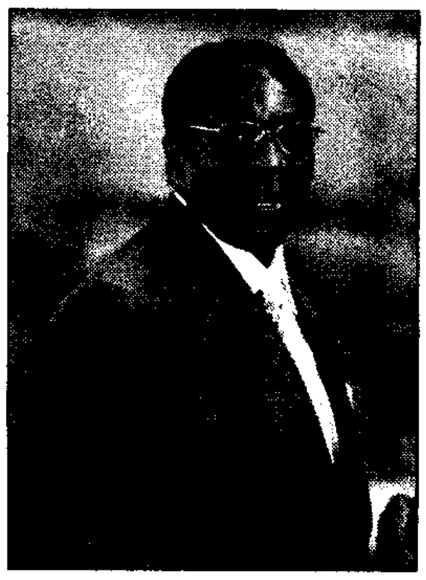
PS: Mrs McVey tells the *Eye* that nine months after the *Newsnight* programme and five years after the death of her daughter she is *still* fighting for full compensation.

PPS: At the time of going to press, Charles Russell declined to justify billing its Ofcom charges to the trust or to confirm Vallance's hourly rate.

ASYLUM

Kitchen stink drama

WHILE the forthcoming election in Zimbabwe has increased political violence there as Robert Mugabe (pictured right) seeks to wear down opposition before the vote, the looming election in Britain has spurred the home office to take a tougher line with asylum seekers – even those who fear for their lives if they are sent back to Zimbabwe.



Last November the government resumed forced returns to Zimbabwe – a cause of great anxiety in particular to one Edneth Gotora, who fled to Britain from her homeland after her husband was killed in their home, and she suffered a terrible assault, by ZANU PF supporters.

Mrs Gotora says her husband was targeted because he spoke for the opposition MDC's youth movement and stored leaflets and other materials at their home. However, having fled Zimbabwe after escaping from hospital in 2002, Mrs Gotora failed to bring the right papers with her to convince the home office of her asylum claim and now faces an uncertain future.

The Rev Colin Offor, of the Stockton United Reformed Church where Edneth worships, is organising a petition to support her claim to stay in Britain. He told *Private Eye* that he was not naïve when it came to asylum claimants and had certainly come across cases he doubted. But he believes Edneth is "deeply traumatised and does not push herself forward, but is clearly speaking the truth".

Local MP Frank Cook told the *Eye* that while "we pay such lip service to domestic violence, there is violence on a national scale in Zimbabwe. She should not be sent back to the same blood-stained kitchen".

With elections looming in both countries, Mrs Gotora is between a rock and a hard place.

NHS PRIVATISATION

The Priestleys' Tale

JUST a few weeks after treasury chief secretary Paul Boateng launched his mission to accelerate the "commercialisation of the public sector" at the annual conference of the private finance initiative promoter Partnerships UK (*Eye* 1121), news emerges of the failed attempt to commercialise a huge chunk of the NHS's property estate.

One of former health secretary Alan Milburn's big ideas was a public private partnership (PPP) deal for the NHS's property management and consultancy company, which goes by the suitably "new" Labour name of Inventures. The lucky bidder would also buy hundreds of millions of pounds worth of surplus health service land and property for onward sale, an activity which previously had been performed by the boringly public sector NHS Estates.

The *Eye* last looked at the deal a year ago (1099) after the national audit office (NAO) was asked to investigate claims from the unsuccessful bidder of various conflicts of interest among the NHS, its advisers and the winning consortium of construction firm Miller and HBOS bank.

Although the NAO decided the result should stand, it criticised plenty of "not good practice", including the attendance of Inventures chair Kate Priestley and chief operating officer David Lawrence at the meeting where the winner (their preferred candidate) was picked by the department of health, and unrecorded conversations between Miller managers and the NHS before the winning bidder was named. The NAO also revealed that Inventures managers had considered paying themselves a bonus from the proceeds for selling the company.

Despite assurances from the department of health at the time that the deal was still on, it was soon dropped with minimum publicity. Ms Priestley and her fellow directors tried to generate support for a management buy-out; but John Reid, by then Milburn's replacement as health secretary, turned his nose up at that too. Instead NHS Estate's surplus land will be transferred to the office of the deputy prime minister (ODPM) to be used and disposed of without private sector involvement. Inventures is expected to close in March, leaving its 270 staff with uncertain futures.

While the whole sorry affair has cost taxpayers a fortune, it seems immune from scrutiny. Only Tory MP Tim Loughton, when shadow health spokesman, has shown any interest in it. In June 2003 he tabled a series of awkward parliamentary questions on the deal, prompting health minister John Hutton to throw the usual "commercial confidentiality" veil over the subject.

The little information Loughton did extract included the statement that no meetings, to the best of the minister's knowledge, had taken place between Inventures' senior management, ie Ms Priestley and co, and the bidders. It is difficult to see where the minister could have got this information, which was later found by the NAO to be wholly untrue, other than from the Inventures senior management itself.

Another interesting fact unearthed by Mr Loughton was that up to June 2003 the department of health had spent £330,000 on legal advice from solicitors Beechcroft Wansbroughs, whose healthcare property specialist at the time was one Simon Priestley, son of Kate. The obvious conflict of interest presented here was not addressed by the NAO last year and appears not to have been questioned since.

As for the other costs, all that is known is that the total costs of the "proposed real estate partnership" had reached £13.4m by the end of March 2004. This includes the department's advice from the ubiquitous KPMG which just happened to be the auditor of both companies in the winning consortium but which, the NAO report revealed, forgot to mention this when appointed.

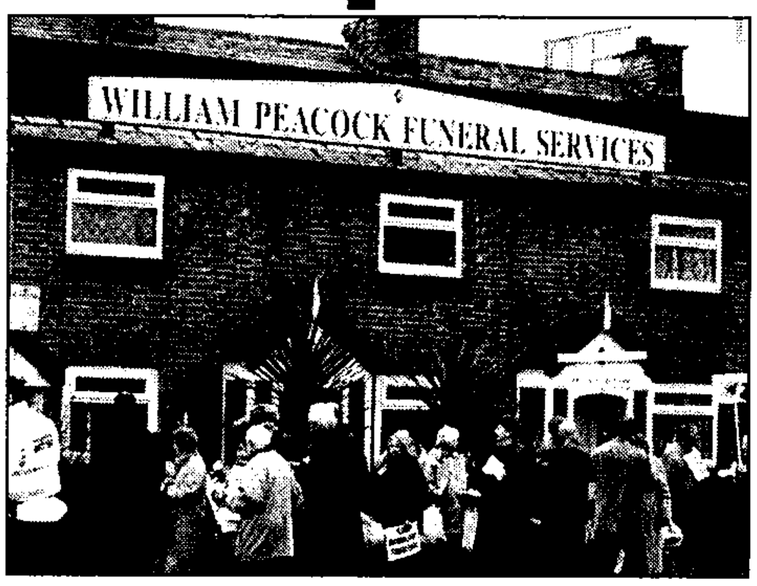
While £13m would pay for scores of nurses, Hutton breezily dismissed it as "a very small proportion of the likely eventual value of the property portfolio". Further costs will almost certainly emerge when Miller and HBOS make their claims for compensation for having their PPP deal pulled at the last minute.

With so much unexplained about the aborted sell-off, not least why it was cancelled so late in the day, it would be surprising if the NAO hasn't conducted further investigations. It knows from its discovery last year of "not good practice" in the few areas it did look at that not all was above board. One *Eye* reader reports that an investigation *was* conducted, suggesting there were some bumper pay rises at Inventures just before the deal should have gone through, but that its findings for some reason didn't see the light of day.

And what of Kate Priestley? Soon after her management buy-out proposal fell through she was appointed chair of the local government leadership council (LGLC), a quango funded by John Prescott's office. It is charged with helping local government "improve its political and managerial leadership" by "providing advice on what works". Some mistake, surely?

DEVELOPMENT

No co-operation



THE caring, sharing Co-op prides itself on being different to other big businesses.

"Community development and participation is at the heart of the Co-operative movement and United Co-operatives has made it clear that it wishes to be a community builder," boasts its website. Nevertheless, residents of Didsbury village, Manchester, turned out in force to protest about United Co-op's plans to pull down an attractive row of three 200-year-old cottages, rip up the gardens and replace them with a three-storey retail block.

The villagers collected 600 protest signatures in less than two hours. But the Co-op seems so determined to bulldoze the opponents from Didsbury Civic Trust and elsewhere who want to preserve what is left of the shrinking old village, it has taken the case to the high court *before* the planning application has even been decided by Manchester city council planning committee.

This extraordinary move was prompted by the revelation that five members of the planning committee – who last November had voted in favour of the Co-op's plans – failed to declare an interest. They were sponsored by or members of the Co-op.

Following legal advice from the council that the five councillors should withdraw from future consideration of the scheme, the Co-op – no doubt fearing the delicate vote would then go against it – resorted to the courts. Last week it obtained a temporary injunction banning the planning committee from considering the application until it could test the council's legal advice.

The Co-op says one business in the row, William Peacock's Funeral Services, has to go because it is handling barely one funeral a week and is no longer viable. To do as the campaigners wish and develop behind the historic façade would not provide enough shop space to attract business clients and it would still be a "non-viable" site, claimed Mark Craig, general manager of Co-operative Affairs.

Campaigners say this is Co-op speak for attracting bigger enterprises such as Boots, rather than the smaller enterprises they know are interested. "They are out to make as much money as they can, just like any other property developer," says protester Bernice Wilson.

TAX AVOIDANCE

GLO worms

THE tax avoidance gravy train might not be giving passengers the smooth ride they hoped for to judge by goings-on at Dorsey and Witney, the law firm coordinating challenges to company tax laws on the grounds that they breach European law.

The *Eye* has learnt that many of Dorsey's multinational clients are losing patience at the time and expense involved in suing the government, ie UK taxpayers, for repayments of tax made over many years.

The companies appear to have believed that the "group litigation order" (or GLO) they signed up to would be relatively painless and followed swiftly by a nice fat cheque signed by Gordon Brown. But the Inland Revenue has other ideas and is ensuring that every legal avenue is exhausted before the exchequer has to pay the tens of billions the GLOs might eventually cost.

This rearguard action, racking up huge legal fees for the government and the companies alike, recently prompted the barrister arguing most of the companies' cases before the courts, tax avoidance specialist Graham Aaronson QC, to complain to the *International Tax Review* that "proceedings in some of the GLOs have been more protracted than anticipated. In no way is that down to Dorsey & Whitney or anyone on the claimant side."

The law firm trying to screw as much public cash as it can for its clients (and correspondingly enormous fees for itself) is, however, having trouble keeping key staff taken on to handle the ballooning litigation. Early last year Dorsey recruited tax expert Philip Martin from Marks & Spencer, the company whose claim for UK tax relief on losses made elsewhere in Europe was heard in the European court of justice last week. But by the end of the year, amid talk of internal turmoil, Dorsey and Martin had abruptly parted company, with the Dorsey partner leading the legal challenges, Simon Whitehead, saying: "He was an employee of the firm here. He isn't anymore." (The taciturn Whitehead can take comfort from the continued presence at the firm of a man with useful inside knowledge, former Inland Revenue lawyer George Gillham, who turned from gamekeeper to much better paid poacher last September.)

Mr Martin, meanwhile, has been more outspoken, accusing the Revenue in a letter to the *Financial Times* of having tried "dirty tricks" to stop M&S taking its case to Europe, and alleging that the government is knowingly running an illegal tax system.

Knowledge of most tax dodging by multinationals never gets beyond the offices of the Inland Revenue and the accountants and lawyers who dream up the scams, but the GLOs require claimants to enter a public register, and the *Eye* has been only too happy to reveal the companies on these registers and their well-connected directors. Some are known not to be relishing being identified as responsible for a big hole in Gordon Brown's finances when, as many pundits predict, he has to raise everybody else's taxes after the next election to fill it.

The latest name on the register is Shell, the company that last week reported profits of £9bn. In joining the "loss relief" GLO, the company hopes to cash in if M&S wins its case, for an amount rumoured to dwarf the £30m M&S is after.

Shell wouldn't of course want any such payout from the treasury to be described as a "windfall", for fear of goading the chancellor into levying the kind of tax that many are calling for on Shell's exorbitant profits.

In the City

TERRY SMITH, the combative chief executive of brokers Collins Stewart Tullett, is a man with friends in most newspaper City offices (outside of the *Financial Times* whose finances he threatens with a libel action due for trial in April) if not so many in the City itself.

The reason is simple. Smith became a financial hack's hero in 1992 when he stood up to his then employer, Swiss bank UBS, over his book *Accounting for Growth* which told it like it was about the balance sheet tricks used by major companies.

Smith was fired but his reputation was made. For the next eight years he became a helpful, available and authoritative source for City journalists probing flaky corporate numbers. That fan club became particularly valuable from October 2000 when Collins Stewart floated weeks after the stock market began its long march south. And the Friends of Terry became useful again when the split capital trusts scandal began to materialise in late 2001.

Collins Stewart had been a major marketer of "splits", acting as broker to more than 20 trusts that raised over £3bn from investors. The "friends" then became even more useful once the Financially Supine Authority (FSA) began its belated drive to obtain compensation for the 50,000 "splits" victims a year ago.

Smith and the equally aggressive John Duffield of fund managers New Star lead the charge which resulted in the FSA accepting £194m – almost half the £350m compensation it once deemed the minimum acceptable. Collins Stewart's share was £10m – a definite result given that it probably earned at least three times that from "splits".

Smith also found himself in need of his press pals when former analyst James Middleweek made a series of allegations in 2003 about how Collins Stewart handled new issues as part of a claim for unfair dismissal, since resolved. Smith, never one to run from a scrap, fiercely denied the allegations, denounced Middleweek and sued the *FT* for repeating his allegations.

These were investigated by the FSA which took no serious action.

Throughout the Middleweek and "splits" battles – which in the case of the former analyst became extremely down and dirty, with allegations of blackmail, surveillance, insider-dealing and dodgy dossiers – Smith was in need of support and often received it from certain newspapers. In many cases it could be argued that such support was justified and not biased or bought by past favours, friendships or loyalties. And Smith was no more than acting in the company's interest by assuring it received a fair or good press.

But the disturbing issue for readers is that such friendships were rarely if ever disclosed, either in full or in part, leading to the no doubt unjustified suspicion that perhaps different standards might be being applied by those self-appointed City judges of the public interest for corporate Britain.

The Friends of Terry have become a subject of increasing speculation in recent months among not just other financial hacks but also rivals of Collins Stewart envious of his contacts and seemingly questioning the motives behind their own more critical coverage. Especially unjustified suspicions seem to lurk among those who left Collins Stewart for rival firms even if no evidence exists.

Interest has particularly surrounded the close friendships with Smith claimed for two prominent City hackettes: first Helen Dunne, until last week deputy business editor of the *Mail on Sunday*; and then Caroline Merrell, banking correspondent of the *Times*. No doubt any such friendships were declared to their respective employers.

"Every day we're finding new reserves of money"

Dunne suddenly left the *MoS* after an internal investigation into what were considered unfounded allegations of inappropriate behaviour made against some of her colleagues. Dunne's friendship with Smith, about whom she wrote fulsomely at the time the *MoS* broke the Middleweek story, was not the reason for her departure. Examination of her articles to last December concerning Collins Stewart, the FSA and the "splits" promoters row reveals no grounds for complaint even if there had been on occasion sharp criticism of the FSA and support for the companies' position.

Merrell also covered the "splits" scandal for the *Times* and had written about Collins Stewart from 1999 until last August. But again none of these articles indicates any particular pro-Smith bias. Still their friendship was sufficient to excite the attention of inquisitive *Daily Mail* hacks earlier this year. But nothing was published – no doubt because there was nothing newsworthy or inappropriate to report.

But Dunne and Merrell are far from alone among the Friends of Terry. There is also that long-standing friend, former employee and fellow Collins Stewart shareholder Robert Peston, now business editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Peston left the *FT* to join Collins Stewart in 2000 to run its Quest online company research unit just before the flotation. Peston received 3,164 shares which were floated at 316p. He still holds these shares, according to the company registrars. The price is now 420p. When he made his move to Collins Stewart, Peston explained he was doing so because he wanted to retire by the time he was 45 in five years' time "so if I can go and make a shed-load of money in the meantime then that has to be worth doing".

Clearly his timing was wrong, his plans changed or his greedy glands dictated a return to newspapers in the wake of the stock market collapse: by April 2002 Peston had emerged at the *Sunday Telegraph*. Smith was quickly given a monthly column as well as becoming a judge for the paper's business awards in 2002 and last year.

The *Telegraph*, like the *MoS*, was often very well informed on the "splits" promoters' battle with the FSA. It often veered towards the companies' side. Headlines such as "How the FSA forced me to side with the brokers"(Peston's own comment column on 9 May 2004), "FSA confidentiality howler in split capital investment probe" (16 May) and "New Star threatens to sue City regulator for defamation"(23 May).

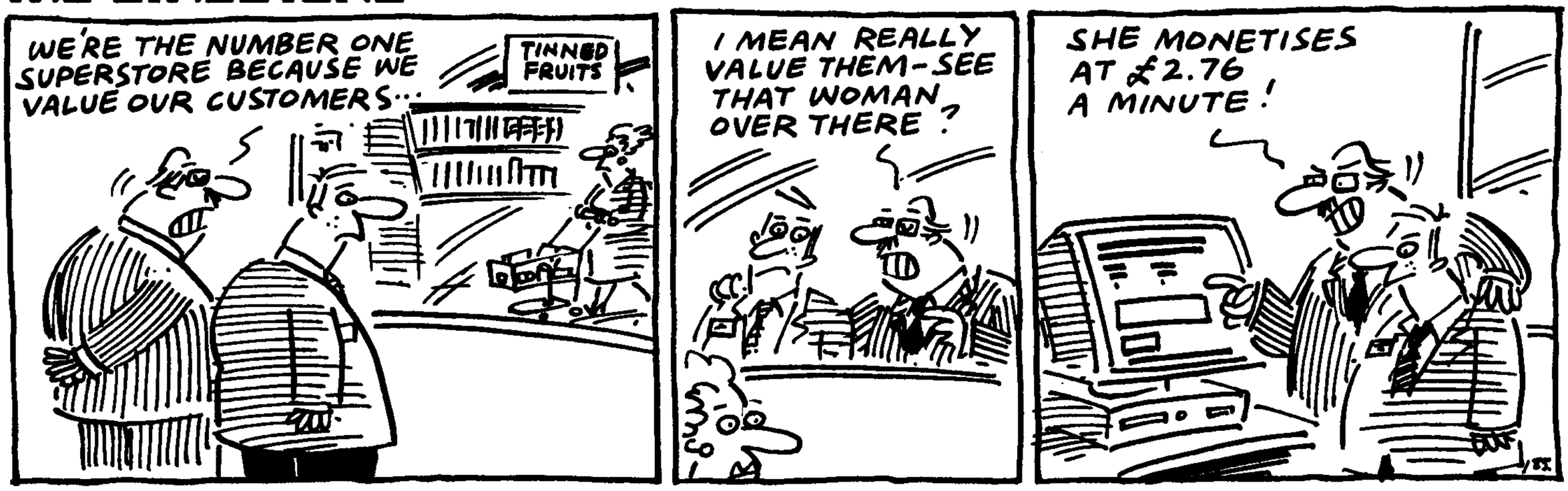
Peston also wrote in praise of Smith as an "exemplar of pay restraint" (25 April). In none of these or other articles that carried Peston's byline was there space to report that he was a current Collins Stewart shareholder who could benefit from a smaller compensation payment or had been an employee towards the end of the time "splits" were being sold. Curiously, in earlier articles there were often references to his former job at Collins Stewart but not to the shareholding. This was clearly an innocent oversight based on the fact that the shareholding was known internally and the previous employment had been mentioned in the past.

Then there is the interesting position of the *Observer*, which was also often well informed and sympathetic to Smith and Collins Stewart, especially on the Middleweek/*FT* saga. It published (7 September 2003) a transcript of an interview between Smith and Middleweek's lawyer. Business editor Frank Kane also demanded (22 August 2004) FSA and police investigations into a mysterious dossier which was circulated to certain newspapers last year. Kane was again supportive of Smith against the *FT* in an article on 17 October.

It is no doubt coincidental that financial PR for Collins Stewart was handled by Redleaf Communications, whose chief executive is Emma Kane, former wife of the *Observer* business editor; and Nick Miles of M Communications of whom he is a fan – "their clients are worth knowing" Frank Kane told the *Independent* last December.

All journalists have friends, many of them are valuable sources of stories or corroboration. This often leads to sticky situations when the source is the story. But there are ways of dealing with such conflicts – by not covering the story personally or at least not publicly. But for a group that is forever accusing others of failing the Caesar's wife test over disclosure or behaviour, there can only be one rule for City hacks: if you write then you have to disclose. After all, City pages are always trumpeting that it is the public's right to know. That applies to readers, not just shareholders.

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG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Number crunchings

£80m

■ Amount Shell paid in fines to regulators last year for overstating reserves

£9,000m

■ Profit Shell made last year

OUTRAGE continues over the manner in which Yukos lost its prize oil-producing asset at a knockdown price to Kremlin-backed rival Rosneft.

But before Yukos investors accuse Russia of state-sponsored theft, they should remember that its jailed former chairman Mikhail Khodorkovsky paid $309m for 78 percent of Yukos in 1995 – a stake that two years later was valued at close to $10bn. That the Yukos auction was controlled by his bank Menatep. That the only other Russian bidder was blocked by the Kremlin who also barred any foreign bids. And that Khodorkovsky is suspected of using either Yukos cash or assets to put up most or all of the $309m which was just $9.125m above the minimum asking price. What goes around, comes around.

THE Serious Farce Office investigation into the alleged £400m over-charging of the National Health Service for generic drugs is expected to continue well into the summer. This suggests it may be early autumn before any charges are brought.

Several teams of SFO interrogators are carrying out wide-ranging interviews under caution of a large number of individuals, not just from the six target companies initially raided but other suppliers as well as wholesalers and others engaged in the supply chain. This programme is expected to mean that the key director/corporate targets are unlikely to be interviewed now before June or July.

So far it is said that those interviewed under caution are being told that no immunity deals can be offered in return for witness testimony, which is unlikely to appeal to their legal advisers. However, it is understood that some minor participants have been approached to see if they will cooperate in return for a get-out-of-jail card. But without immunity it may be very difficult to persuade the minor participants to give evidence against the major targets in the alleged price-fixing.

Still, the SFO is said to be confident – despite the complexity that the story told by the paper trail of meetings, memos and correspondence, plus one or two already signed-up key insiders, is sufficient to prove the conspiracy to defraud and deceive the NHS by not just the alleged secret price-fixing cartel but also the provision of false and inflated costs.

Meanwhile critics of the SFO point out that even on the best analysis of its performance with cases much simpler than the NHS prosecution is likely to be, it still loses at best a third and at worst almost half its cases.

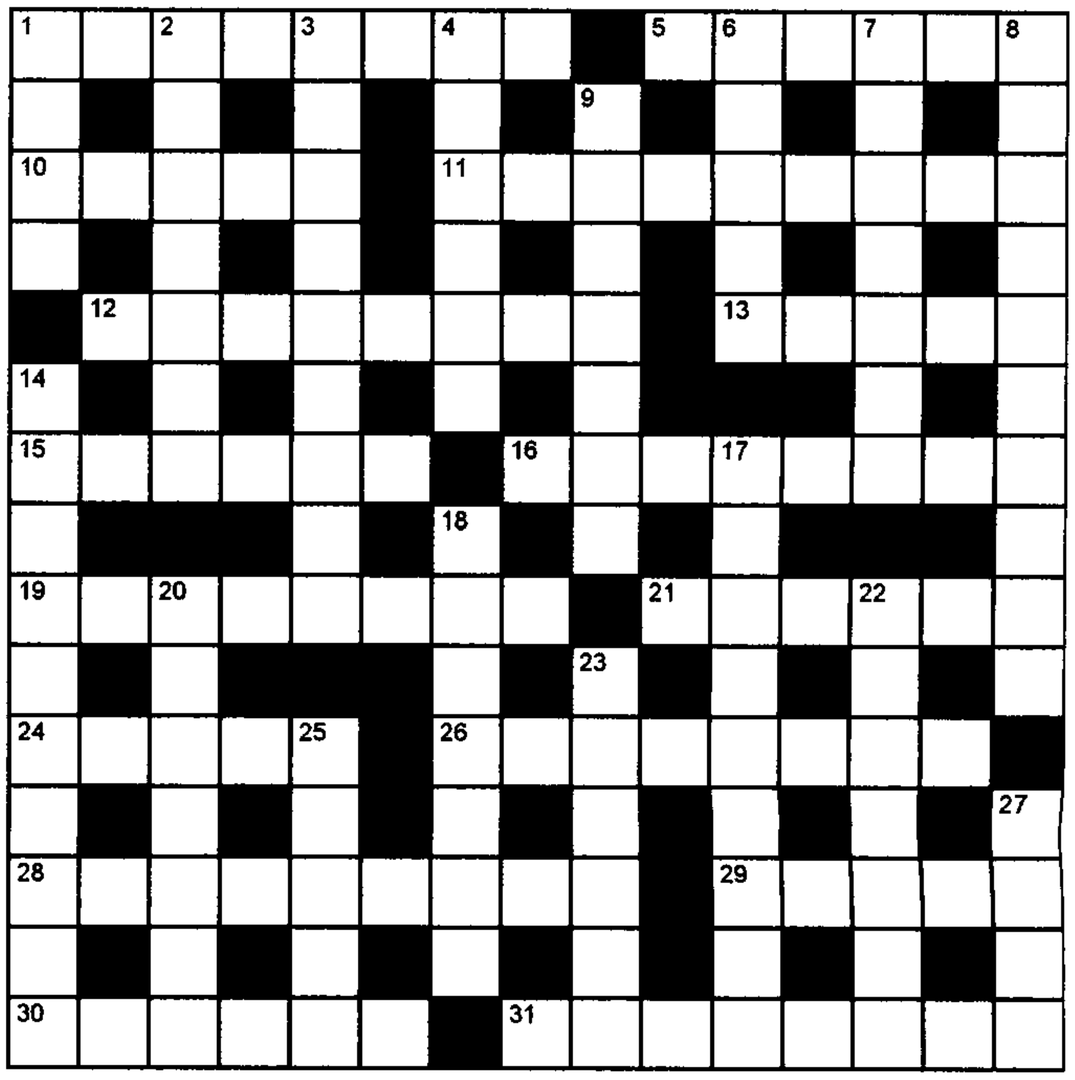
The trial stats are even less impressive. Only a third of defendants in recent SFO trials were found guilty. Since January 2004 it has won 16 guilty verdicts at trial compared with 22 guilty pleas against 30 acquittals by judge (mostly) or jury. Trials in the three years from April 2001 to April 2004 saw only 20 defendants convicted against 30 acquitted, so more than half the prosecutions were lost.

This is despite the fact that it is taking longer and longer to prepare prosecutions for trial – on average almost 3.5 years in 2003-4. Any NHS case will easily exceed that figure. It will be three years in April since the six companies were raided in an investigation which began in 2001!

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 281

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 25 February 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1/1D Fellow feeling bird – jump, for pity's sake! (8,4)
5 Useless type, 'Pudding Brenda' (6)
10 Clinton's one-time vice – "fanny", for the record (5)
11 Try to pray for rehabilitation of this unpopular lot! (4,5)
12 Just the place for nags to get laid and boss husband (4,4)
13 Blair's head in spin – he doesn't welcome this sort (5)
15 Over-elaborate royal habit (6)
16 Rather too casual gent removed – wow! – flimsy female wear (8)
19 Hot air produced by right-hand, erotic manipulation (8)
21 A tumble's good in the morning with hairless bollocks (6)
24 Reversal of Blair party by a Conservative political clique? (5)
26 Piss taken by medical staff? (8)
28 Naomi's right out of place in the old town's starry group (4,5)
29 Suffer hot dog (5)
30 Tabloid young lover of Conservative leader's last to go, flipping lout (3,3)
31 College's onto sporty simultaneous coupling (8)

DOWN

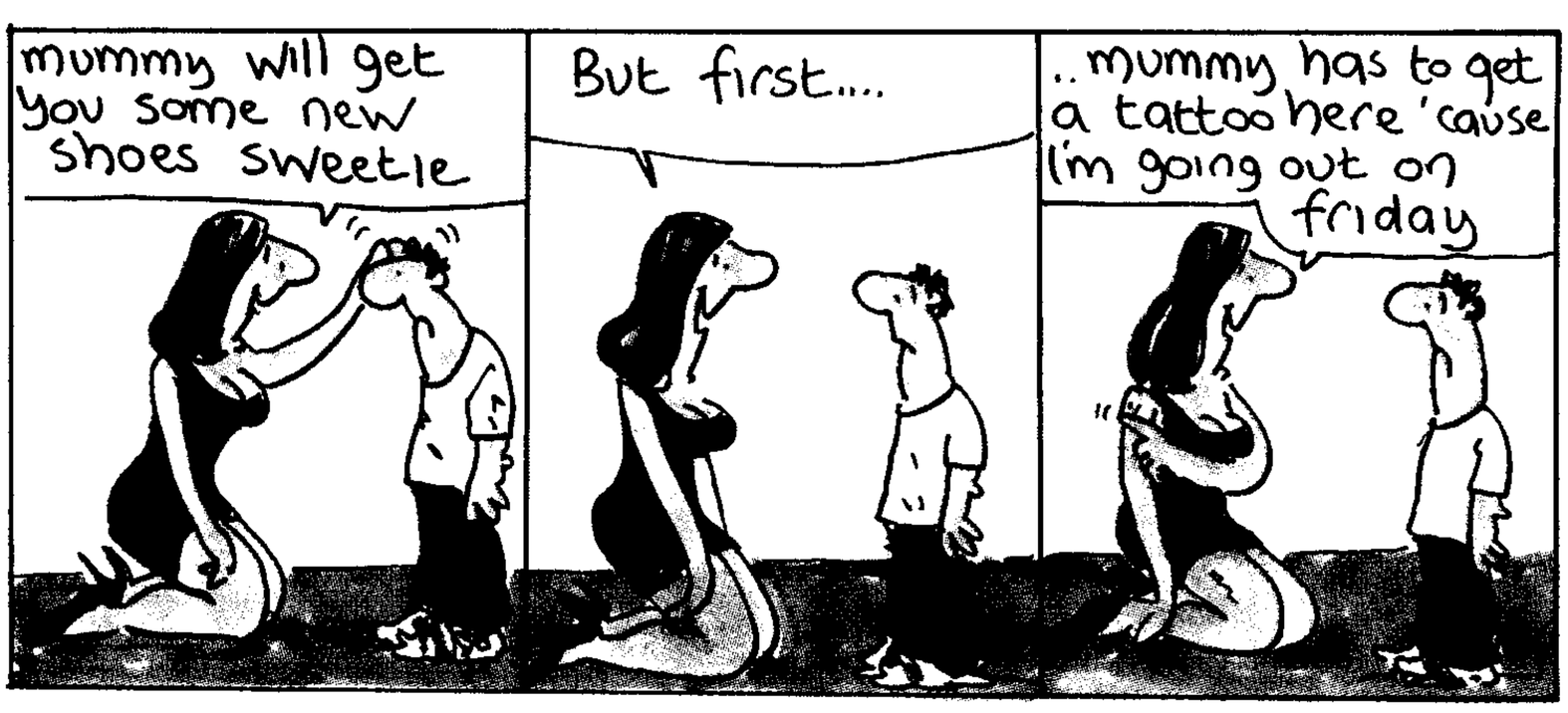
1 See 1 Across
2 Be most excited getting head from Robin Hood (7)
3 Protected species of member, a penis substitute long having replaced date (9)
4 Chart-topping performer? He'll slay 'em! (6)
6 Stimulant making a meal pointless? (5)
7 Figure out about Blair's number one being incendiary type (7)
8 Explosive put under Brenda, say, as the queen gets to eat? (5,5)
9 Delirious etc. about arse of highly fanciable type (7)
14 Fertility rating of Dracula, maybe, after sulphur put on hairdo (5,5)
17 Blair, lacking bar skill is a hindrance (9)
18 Having a wee drink, up and confess (7)
20 E-bay's involved with M&S's disastrous 'mission' (7)
22 One sec. fumbling inside underwear in Italian city (7)
23 Flow-interrupter attached to party nutter! (6)
25 Where to send the unwanted member: Howard's no. 2 (5)
27 Lot of dollars injected into leaderless Conservative party out of control (4)

Crossword 280 winner: MARTIN HOLBROOK

ACROSS: 7 Offal 9 Crackdown 10/18/20 Some bloke off the telly 11 Alkie 12 Oaring 13 Stick out 16 Young 19 Remit 21 Airstrip 22 Psyche 25 Tyson 27 Glory hole 28 Run of luck 29 Natal.

DOWN: 1 Dogsbody 2 Fly-by-night 3 Have it off 4 Okra 5 Bookworm 6 Unseat 8 Femur 9 Clot 14 Curtseying 15 Poking fun 17 Uprising 21 Artery 23 Clout 24 Cock 26 Naff.

HUSBAND



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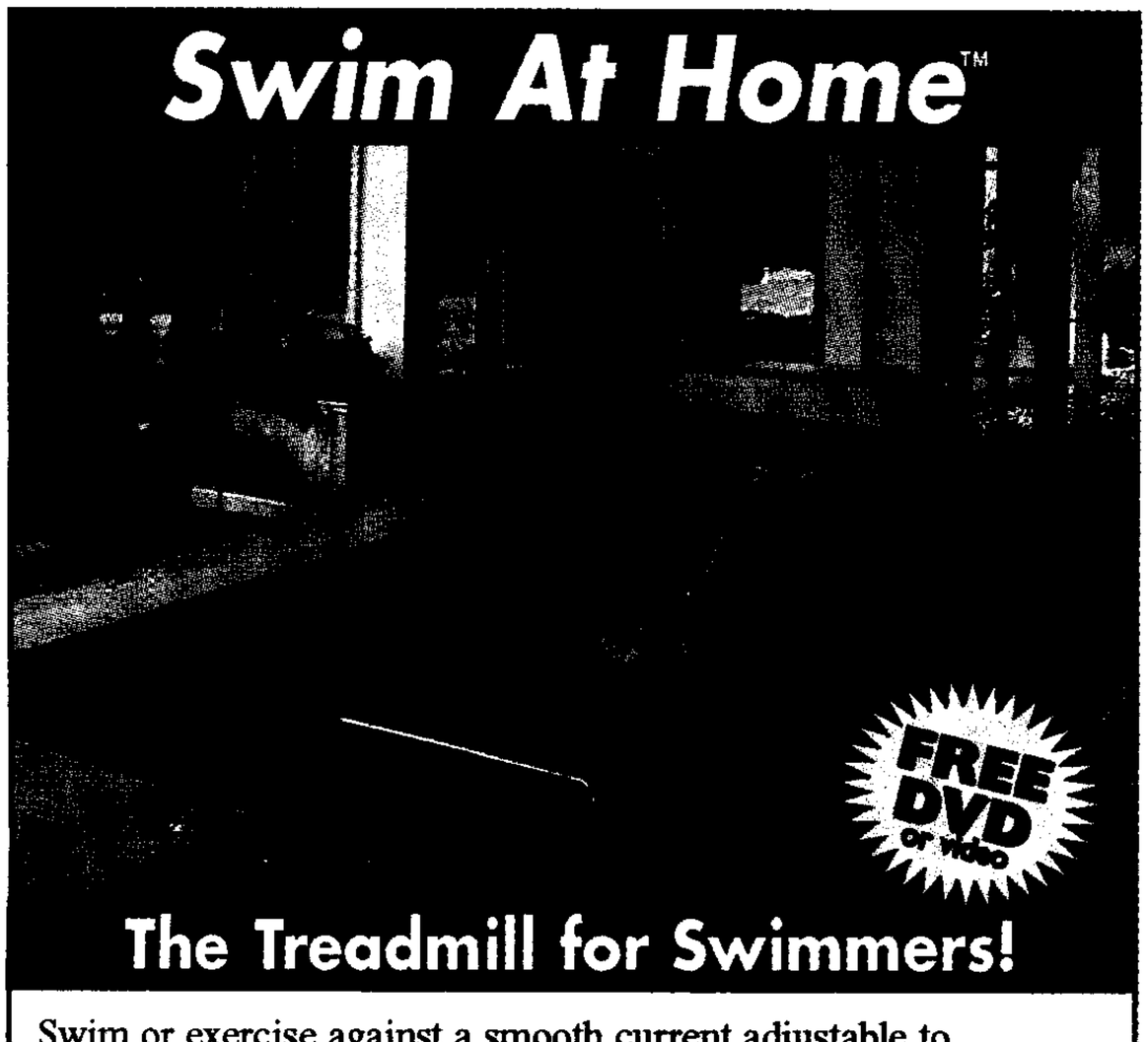

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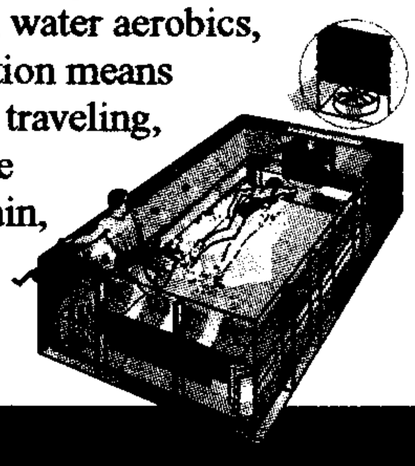

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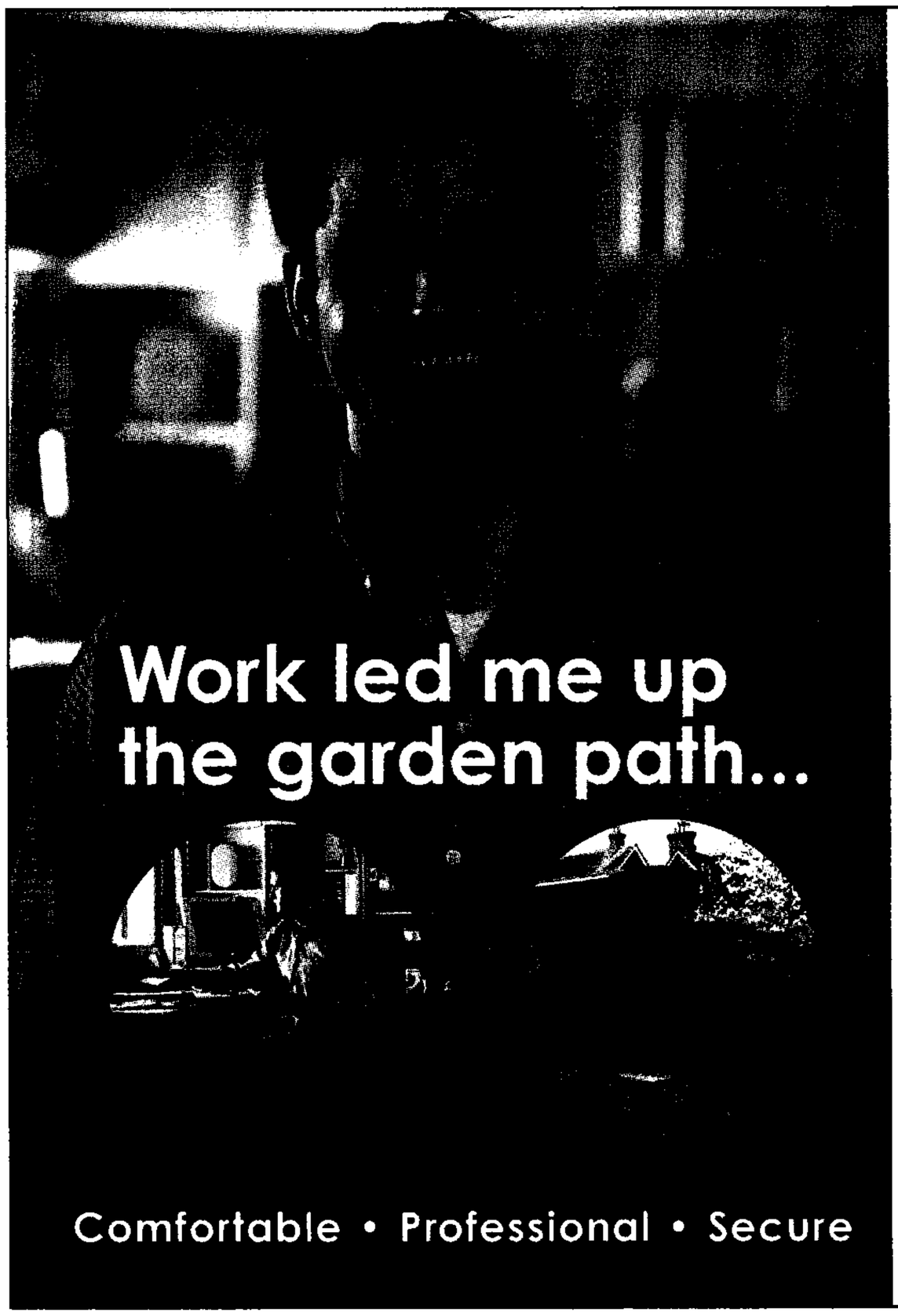

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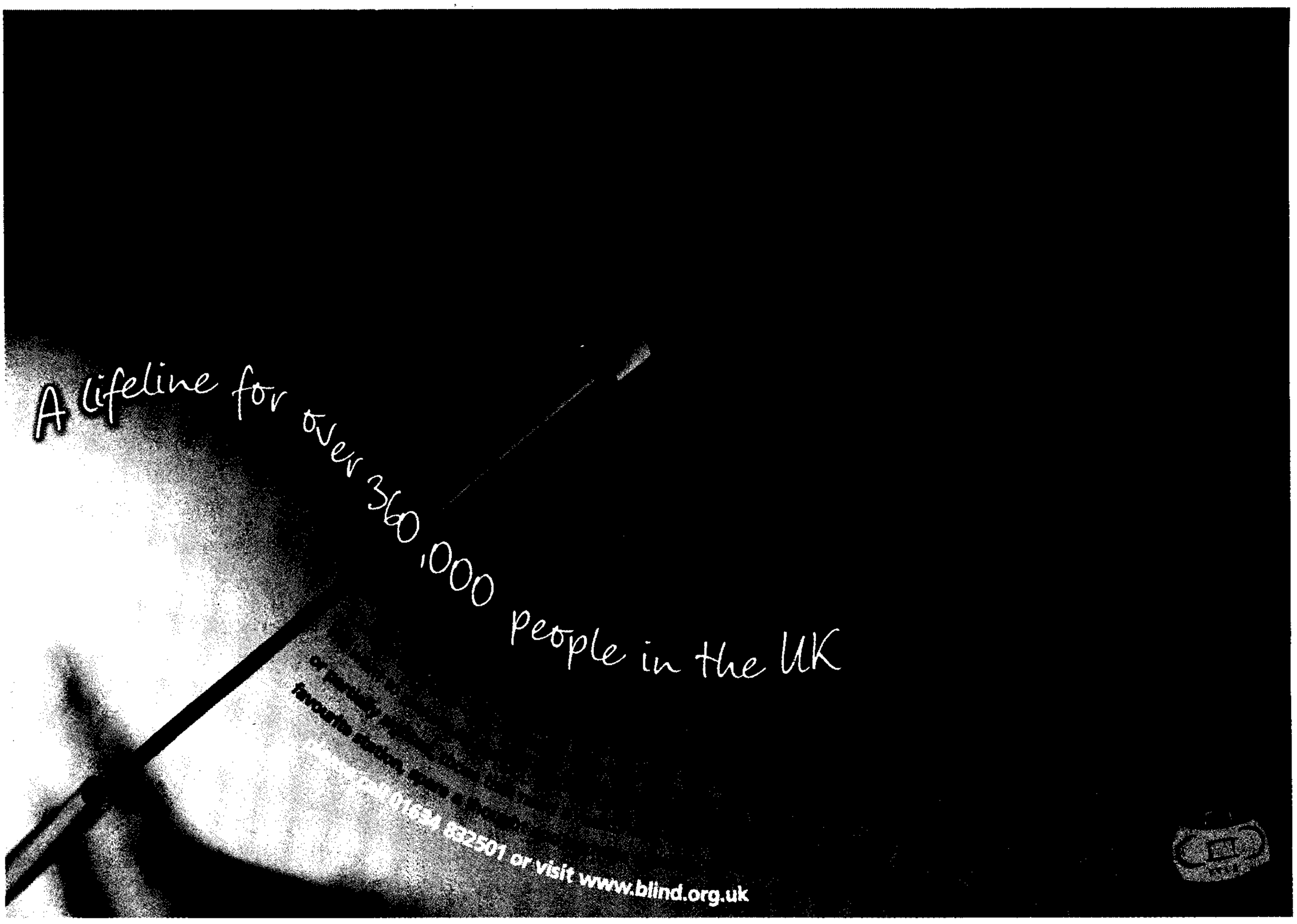

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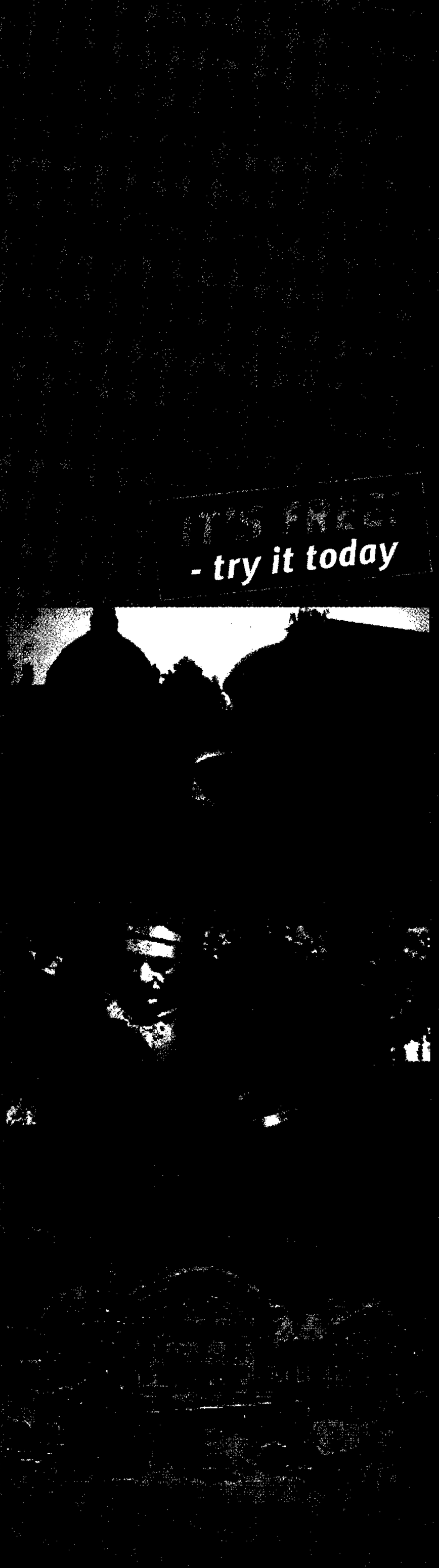

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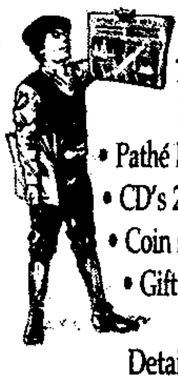

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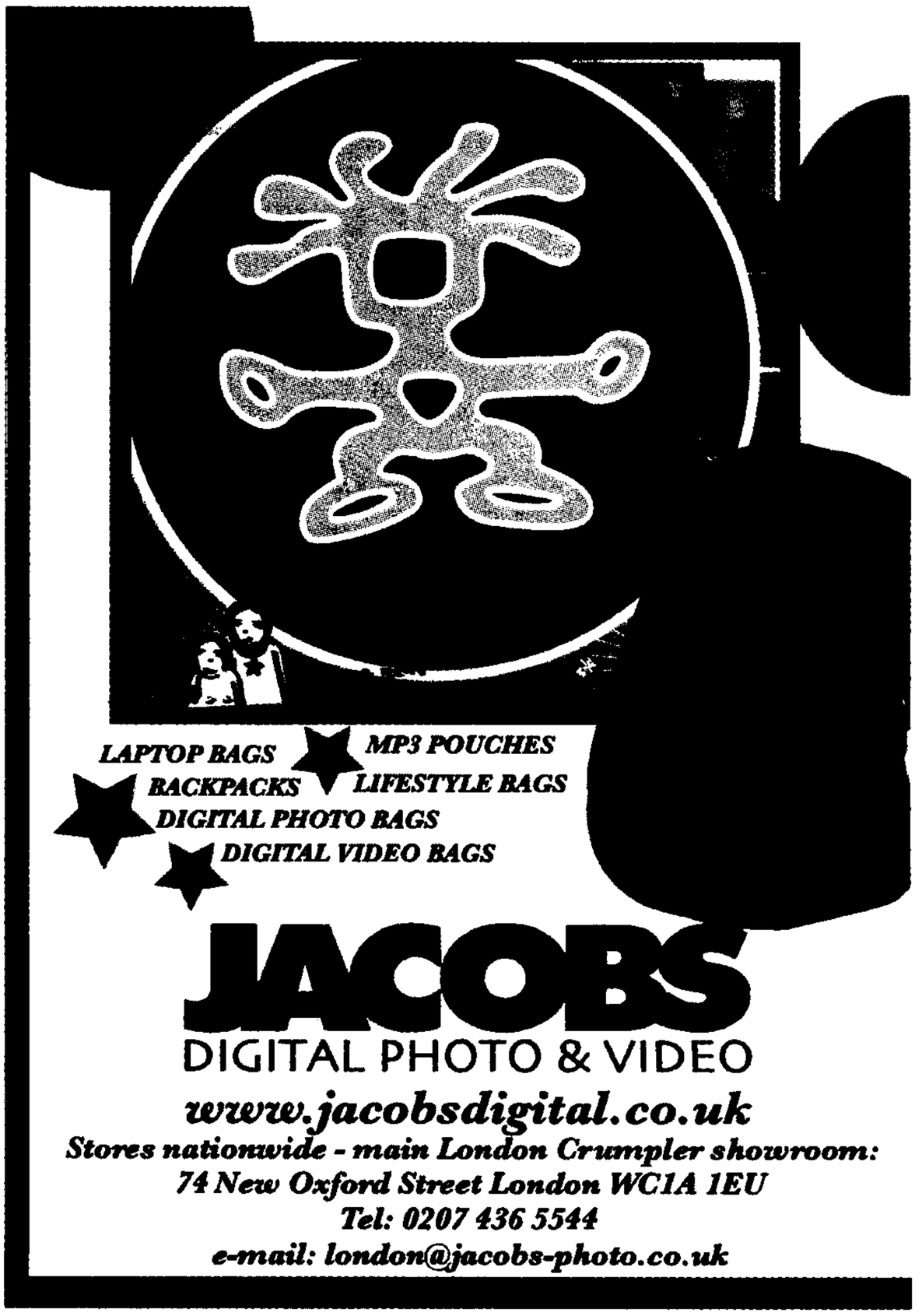

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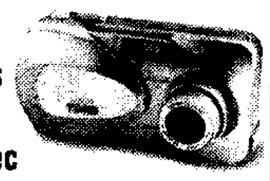

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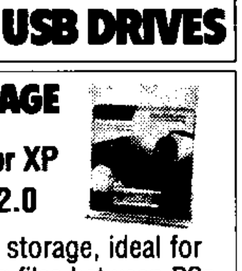

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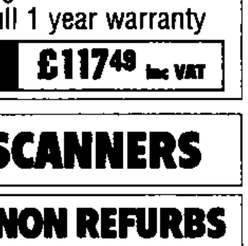

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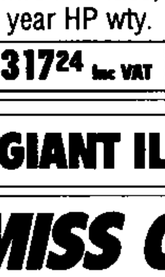

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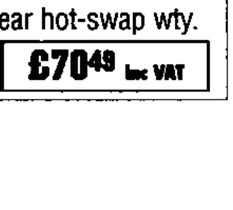

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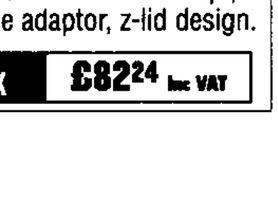

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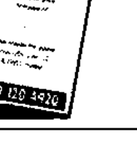

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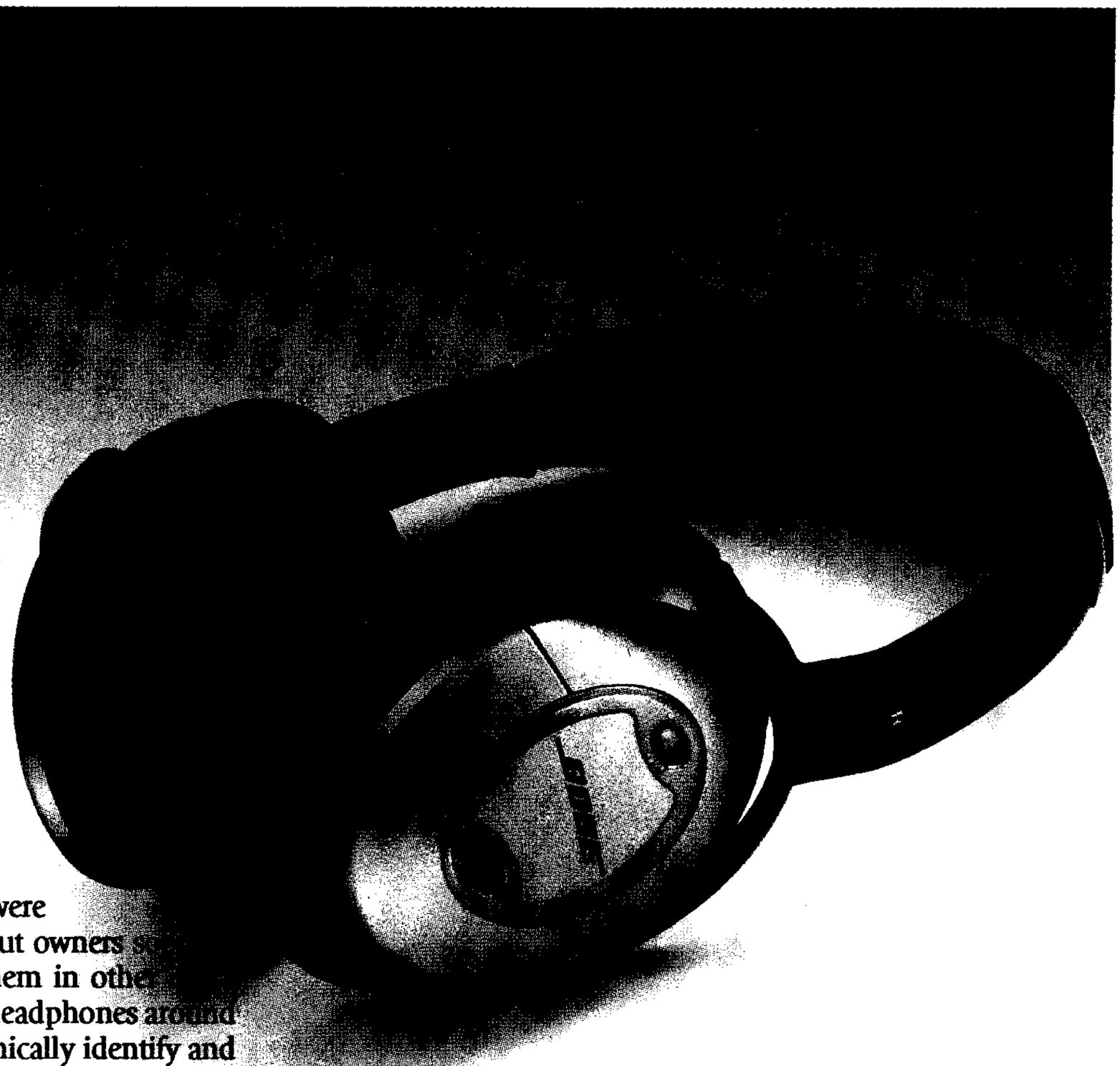

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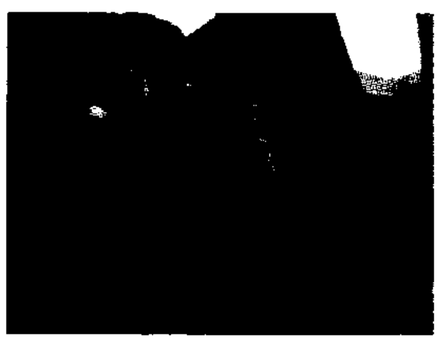

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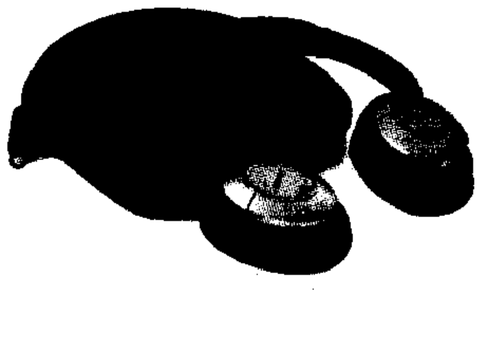

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